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Caste and Kin in Nepal, India and Ceylon

ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES IN
HINDU-BUDDHIST CONTACT ZONES

Edited by

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2. *Social Mobility in the Newar Caste System*

INTRODUCTION

One of the most observant and entertaining accounts of the process of social mobility in a system of rigid stratification is that given by Molière in “Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme”. A Newar audience in Kathmandu would have no difficulty whatsoever in following the pretensions and comic tribulations of Monsieur Jourdain as he learns to dress in silks and satins, to speak poetry, to fence, to dance the minuet, to acquire the airs and style of a “gentilhomme”. The Newars are well acquainted with their own Newar counterparts of this classic figure of status seeking. Though the particular Newar status symbols are of course different, the theme of Molière’s comedy is thoroughly familiar to them. It is this theme of individual and group social mobility in the Newar caste system that forms the main subject of this essay.

I do not propose to discuss the definition of the term “caste”: readers can judge for themselves from the evidence I give, according

The fieldwork on which this essay is based took place in the Kathmandu Valley between April, 1956 and May, 1957, when I was on overseas research leave from the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London. I wish to express my thanks to the Governors and Director for providing me with this valuable opportunity for research, and also to those of my colleagues at the School who were engaged at the same time on studies in Nepal in various fields of scholarship and who helped me on numerous occasions in the Kathmandu Valley. I am also indebted to the Directors of the Wenner-Gren Foundation for a most generous supplementary grant which enabled me to undertake an extensive collection of information on Newar caste demography.

to their own favoured definitions, whether the Newar form of social stratification meets the requirements of "a caste system" as they understand the implications of this concept. For my own part, I take "caste" simply to be a form of social stratification in which the necessary statements and judgments about relative status are couched predominantly in a traditional ritual language. In a particular caste system the differing status positions of the component groups are in my view derived ultimately and basically, as in all systems of hierarchical stratification, from the distribution of political and economic *power* within that system. The language of ritual behaviour is used conventionally to express and validate status achieved through and based upon the operation of political and economic factors. This essentially is the position taken by Ibbetson in his remarkable report on the Punjab census eighty years ago which still remains the most accurate and satisfactory *sociological* account of the caste system in general, teaching us more about the principles according to which it is actually constructed and about the processes that actually operate within it than we would get from a lifelong study of the works of Brahmanical obscurantists who have for centuries been sedulously promulgating the theories of ritual purity and impurity as an *explanation* of caste precedence. The superior position of the Brahman, depending mainly on the power and patronage of the ruler where it has not depended directly on his own political and economic power, has been made secure to the extent to which he has been able to disseminate these mystical theories. There is ample evidence, some very recent, that Indian sociologists have not been immune from this persistent indoctrination. Ibbetson at least, together with a number of his colleagues such as Gait and Rose and Nesfield and Risley, had to face the caste systems he encountered as a practical administrator and to deal with the empirical realities of the differential distribution of power. He shrewdly noted that the change in the political and economic importance of a caste was accompanied by a change in its ritual status, and that the latter change was invariably preceded by the former. In Ibbetson's terms, "social standing, which is all that caste means, depends very largely on political importance, whether present or belonging to the recent past The rise in the social scale which accompanies increased political importance will presently be followed by a rise in

caste".¹ Ibbetson goes on to describe how, given increased political and economic importance, a caste may increase its "social standing" through the observance of what he calls "the artificial standards" (i.e. the rules of ritual avoidance) of Brahmanical Hinduism. "Caste", says Ibbetson, "has no necessary connection with the Hindu religion" (in the same sense, I take it, that clan organisations have no *necessary* connection with totemism, or family structures with ancestor worship, or feudalism with Christianity).

This process of upward mobility consequent upon political and economic change has recently been termed "Sanskritisation" by Srinivas in a series of valuable and stimulating contributions well familiar to all students of caste.² The introduction of this term has of course been useful in awakening the interest of observers in this process, but unfortunate in that it has tended to concentrate attention solely on the ritual and "acculturation" aspects of a complex *social* phenomenon, misleading and ethnocentric in that it applies only to Hindu society and suggests that the process of upward mobility is in some way sociologically unique in that society, and unnecessary in that the existing term "social mobility" describes the process sufficiently and accurately. If we accept "Sanskritisation" we must surely expect a spate of parallel terms to describe the identical social process in Muslim, Sikh, Parsi, and Buddhist caste systems. It is particularly inappropriate and confusing in a discussion of the Newar caste system in which there occurs the co-existence of both the Hindu and Buddhist cultural traditions, both equally "Sanskritic" in content and derivation.

Social mobility can of course be divided into two categories—group mobility and individual mobility: the former, generally discussed in terms of caste fission and sub-caste formation, being a ubiquitous feature of caste systems; the latter, where it implies and involves the quitting of one caste for another higher in the scale, held to be absent and impossible in caste systems where (apart from rare instances of successful cheating and "trickery") the rules of endogamy plus the inheritance of permanent caste status at birth combine to block any possibility of individual social advancement across caste boundaries. Both these forms

¹ Ibbetson, Sir Denzil—1881, p. 174.

² Srinivas, M. N.—1952, p. 31.

Barnabas, A. P.—1961, p. 613.

of social mobility occur however among the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley. Before I discuss them in some detail two general observations are necessary about the relationship between power and status.

Firstly, it can be observed that the more rigid and inflexible is a system of social stratification, judged by the relative difficulty and absence of movement upwards or downwards in the scale of social ranks, the more rigorous must be the mechanisms of social control that sustain this system. The rules of order, precedence, and status differentiation must be precise and those who disobey the rules—and thus challenge the accepted form of the system—must be effectively punished. The privileges of the superior orders must be protected and asserted, and individuals of the lower orders must be denied access to positions of authority and to the means and opportunities of economic advancement. Certainly a vital factor in the maintenance of such a system is the fact that, through the inevitable hereditary specialisation of occupation, the system involves a functional and organic unity of the component status groups necessitating a high degree of social and economic co-operation. Individuals born into such a system can readily and understandably come to accept the inequalities of status and the attendant social discriminations as part of the natural order of existence, to explain these inequalities and discriminations in a ideology which upholds the interests and prerogatives of the dominant groups, and to believe that it is a system in which changes are socially impossible (this itself being a tribute to the effectiveness of the supporting sanctions).³ Such a situation classically, traditionally, and ubiquitously occurred in India in the form of the small feudal state in which the caste system depended ultimately for its stability on the final coercive sanction of physical force at the disposal of the ruler (and in the village community in which it depended on the sanctions available to the dominant castes). The more effective the sanctions, the more rigid the system, the more unlikely it is that we shall find instances within it of successful

³ This acceptance of the order by the lower castes has been described in studies of the White/Negro caste systems of the Deep South in America as "the principle of accommodation". See G. Myrdal, 1944, Ch. 31 *passim* for a discussion of this, and p. 1377 for references to the American literature on the subject.

social mobility across the demarcation lines of status grades. Such a "closed" system of stratification is characteristically found in small scale societies, precisely because it is in such societies that the necessary extreme forms of social control operate most effectively. But it must further be said that, for this very reason, small-scale stratified societies everywhere tend to exhibit similar characteristics. Indeed—one can wonder what the theory of social class would look like if all fieldwork on this subject had been undertaken in small rural communities in Western society in which, characteristically rank is mainly ascribed by birth, vertical social mobility within the community is virtually impossible, hereditary specialisation of occupational class predominates, and in which a functional organic unity based on this division of labour occurs. If an individual wants to get ahead in such a community, he has to get out. Inevitably almost all our studies of caste in India have been in small rural communities: we seem at times to be in danger of arguing features inherent in caste organisations which are in fact inherent in the conditions of small scale stratified societies everywhere. As yet, we know little or nothing about caste in Lucknow or Calcutta or Ahmedabad,⁴ and we have as yet no theoretical discussions of the tolerance or modification or adjustments of caste structures (according to the prescriptions of our rural model) to conditions of greatly increased scale and occupational diversification—and essentially to conditions in which it is difficult for a rigorous system of social control to operate smoothly and efficiently. As I shall be indicating presently this factor of scale and of urban concentration is of particular importance in a consideration of the Newar caste system.

Secondly, the continuity of the current form of a particular caste system depends not only on the maintenance of the inequalities

⁴ And we have not begun to consider vigorously the effect on caste membership—in terms of ascription at birth—of the extensive rural-urban migration that has long been a characteristic of many parts of India, the volume of this migration increasing sharply in the last decades. See the excellent recent study of Poona for example where the "data shows that during the last 15 years about 45 per cent of the total sample families (a random sample of the whole city) had migrated to Poona". N. V. Sovani, D. P. Apté, R. G. Pendse, 1956, p. 2. See also S. N. Sen, 1960, p. 10, which shows that "less than one-third" of the total population (approx. 2.5 million in 1951) of Calcutta were born in the city.

(or status differentials) that exist between the component caste groups but also on the maintenance of a status equivalence of the individuals belonging to the same caste. It is a basic convention of the system that the members of a particular caste are all ritually equal—i.e. that they interact with one another socially as members of a single group of peers. This ideological equality is extremely difficult to maintain in practice, even though of course it is constantly expressed verbally and in ritual behaviour (notably in the rules of endogamy and commensality). It is this convention which appears to be the origin of what I call the Fallacy of the Caste Stereotype which has persistently bedevilled sociological discussions of Indian caste systems. The literature is liberally scattered with statements in the form of simple generalisations about the behaviour of caste stereotypes—about “Brahmans”, or “Chamars” or “Jats” or “Julahas” or whatever, on the assumption that even in a single system the individuals comprising these respective groups all occupy a single social rank. There is ample evidence that this assumption is sufficiently inaccurate to be a major impediment to progressive discussion. Ideally all members of a single caste are social equals (and it is this ideal which the ritual expresses): in practice factors of wealth, political power, education, occupational status and so forth operate *within*, as well as between, castes to produce important internal inequalities of status. We know from our studies of Indian caste systems that it is these internal inequalities of economic condition and social prestige which lead to caste fission and sub-caste formation, a group of economic peers hiving off and claiming a higher status than their former caste fellows, and validating this claim by a modification of their ritual behaviour in the direction of accepted Brahmanical standards (the main status symbols of a Hindu caste society)—and so achieving a “correction” of the system in terms of the ideological model of peer groups. But so far as I am aware there are as yet no discussions in the literature or evidence or hypotheses about the range and limits of the internal inequalities that can be tolerated within particular castes before fission occurs, and whether this range of tolerated inequalities varies for castes standing at different points in the overall scale of precedence. Such a discussion would be a useful contribution to our knowledge of caste systems.

Certainly the problem of status inconsistency is endemic in all

systems of rigid stratification, particularly where the social conditions (scale, economic change, diversification of occupations and the opportunity of recruitment to new occupations, possibility of spatial mobility, educational provision and so forth) are such as to reduce the effectiveness of traditional sanctions and thus permit the opening out of significant gaps between ascribed and achieved statuses. Equally the tendency to adjust behaviour so far as is socially permitted so as to limit role conflict and tension and to secure a return to consistency in roles and statuses is characteristic of such systems. Since in a caste system ascribed status is calibrated mainly in ritual symbols, where a "lack of fit" occurs between say the achieved economic and political status of an individual or group on the one hand and his or its ascribed status as expressed in ritual behaviour on the other, one would expect to find some modification of behaviour (or "status seeking") in the latter field of ritual so as to reduce this gap. By and large, though it can be agreed that the process is exceedingly complex, this is what is happening in the process described by Srinivas as "Sanskritisation". But, except perhaps in extreme and isolated instances, it must be observed that a perfect consistency is rare and unlikely. Economic change however arising (taking only one fertile source of status inconsistency) is more or less universal in some degree, and its effects on status are relatively immediate. Concomitant change in the excessively conservative and "traditional" field of ritual behaviour is much more difficult to achieve and slow to take effect. Equally high ritual status is likely to persist, if energetically bolstered by an accepted ideology, long after the basic supports of political and economic power have crumbled or weakened (a situation which is not uncommon in the cases of obsolete European aristocracies, for example). Hence it is not surprising in caste systems to find economic power and ritual status "out of phase" as it were—the result of "cultural lag". But the clear tendency in such situations is towards a correction of the inconsistency—and a variety of mechanisms exist for this purpose.

The status inconsistency of an individual can obviously have a number of distinct patterns (high economic status, high educational status, low ritual status, for example taking only three variables, or these could be reversed or differently weighted). If we follow Lloyd Warner and speak of an individual's location on

several ranks or scales as his "status profile", we could then usefully ask which particular status profiles in a particular caste system lead to role conflict and eventually to upward mobility and which do not. It is difficult, in spite of all the work that has been done, to think of a single study of a caste system in which this crucial question has been explicitly examined and discussed. Clearly the evidence indicates, much as one would expect, that a status profile combining high economic status and low ritual status is productive of particular tension and, given certain conditions, is particularly likely to result in an adjustment of the system of precedence expressed in ritual. We need to know a good deal more about this and other status profiles in actual caste societies if we are to advance the theory of caste systems in general.

Given a particular individual finding himself in a situation in which certain of the status positions that he currently holds manifest a sufficient degree of inconsistency to cause him to be aware of acute role conflict, there would appear to be three choices open to him if the conflict is to be avoided or minimised :

1. To take action as an individual to abandon his lower status positions in favour of a higher position on that scale—that is, if this be possible, to emulate Molière's M. Jourdain and embark on a programme of individual social mobility.
2. To combine with other individuals in a similar perceived situation to achieve a collective amelioration of their position—that is, the process of group mobility, requiring it should be noted a certain degree of co-operation, leadership, organisation and control.
3. He could so behave as to avoid the social situations in which his role conflict becomes apparent. Marriott in his recent exposition of "the four logical conditions" for the elaboration of caste ranking gives as the third "separation from inconsistent interaction elsewhere" and makes it clear that by this he means the separation of a particular system (in one community for example) from another which is different from it.⁵ My view is that this separation can and does occur within a single system, and indeed within the behaviour of a single

⁵ Marriott, McKim—1960.

individual, and that this avoidance is an important method of accommodating inconsistencies in status positions.

Each of these three mechanisms for dealing with the persistent problem of status inconsistency is extremely complex, and all three occur within the Newar caste system with considerable effects on the general structure of the system. It is to a discussion of the Newar system of social stratification with particular attention to this question of status inconsistency that I now turn.

THE SOCIAL SITUATION OF THE NEWARS

Before we plunge into the complexities of Newar caste behaviour, two general comments are necessary about the general social situation of the Newars in the Kathmandu Valley. Each of these points could be discussed at considerable length—I present them as briefly as possible here merely to establish the general background and context against which the details of the system must be understood, and to indicate the extent to which this particular caste system must be treated as a particular variant of Indian caste systems in general.

Firstly, population density and the settlement pattern. The Kathmandu Valley is small, roughly circular in shape with a diameter of about 15 miles (that is, it can easily be crossed on foot from rim to rim within the day) and intensely fertile with rich black alluvial soil giving extremely high yields of rice from the irrigated and intensively cultivated paddy fields. It has an area of 208 square miles and a total population of 413,869 giving a gross population density of approximately 2,000 to the square mile. This remarkable valley is the political heart of the Kingdom of Nepal, the seat of government, the main centre of communications and commerce and education, the site of renowned and ancient Hindu and Buddhist shrines and places of pilgrimage—and essentially the home and cultural centre of the Newar people.

Numerically, and in terms of their ancient and flourishing culture and civilisation, the Newars form the dominant community in this metropolitan valley. They number 225,798, which is 56 per cent of the total population, and speak a separate and exclusive language, Newari, which differs radically from Nepali or Parbatia, the national

language of Nepal (spoken bilingually by most Newars) and the mother tongue of the other main community in the valley—the Parbatia or Gurkha castes who number 164,160 (or 39 per cent of the total population). Each of these two main communities—the Newars and Parbatias—is sub-divided internally into a full range of castes from Brahmans to untouchables in each case : two separate caste systems existing side by side within a common territory and inter-acting and interlocking to an important extent in the manner of a plural society. The remaining 5 per cent of the population of the valley is made up of diverse elements drawn from the mountain regions of the Kingdom, from the low-lying Terai along the southern frontier with India, with of course small groups of foreigners from India to the South and Tibet to the North (and also since Kathmandu is the capital of Nepal, members of diplomatic and aid missions from a whole variety of countries including the Western world). Numerically the most important group amongst this “remainder” are the 23,000 Tamangs, a large peasant tribe who inhabit the mountains immediately surrounding the Kathmandu Valley but who have spilled over into the valley in one or two areas and established small villages just inside the rim.

The valley contains 33 main settlements (including the three main towns of Kathmandu with 108,000 inhabitants, Patan two miles away with 41,000 and Bhatgaon eight miles away with 35,000) all populated mainly or exclusively by Newars, and a whole host of small, scattered hamlets populated almost exclusively by Parbatia castes or Tamangs. I shall be discussing the distribution of Newar castes over these 33 settlements presently—for the moment I simply wish to emphasize the factors of scale and concentration of population which are importantly related to the operation of the Newar caste system.

Secondly, some comments on the co-existence within the compass of this single small valley of the two great cultural traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism, together with a brief account of the effects on caste behaviour of recent historical events in their relationship to these cultural traditions. From remote antiquity Hinduism and Buddhism have existed side by side in the Kathmandu Valley producing the magnificent array of superb temples and stupas and ornate shrines which adorns all three major towns and most of the other thirty Newar communities. Buddhist monasteries

formerly flourished in Kathmandu, Patan and Bhatgaon. But for centuries up to 1768 when the Gurkha invader arrived from the western mountains of Nepal, the valley was divided into three small feudal principalities ruled by Newar kings, the Mallas, who were themselves Hindu. Thus though Buddhism was tolerated without apparent discrimination and Buddhist temples were revered and protected, Hinduism enjoyed a secure domination and ascendancy through royal patronage. And throughout these centuries the strength and vitality of the Buddhist faith in the Kathmandu Valley appears to have undergone a steady decline. The Newar monks in the monasteries surrendered to the dominant philosophy and practices of Hinduism, ceased to be celibate and became fully incorporated into the Newar caste system as a distinct and hereditary priestly caste, vaguely approximating in status to that of the Newar Brahman and with similar exclusive functions in the performance of domestic rituals in the houses of their Buddhist *jajmans* or client families tied by a hereditary relationship to a particular family of priests. The monastic compounds or *viharas* (*baha* in Newari) survived and still survive as ritual centres and as the residences of groups of priestly households. (These erstwhile monastic compounds are referred to in detail later when I examine the internal structure of these Newar Buddhist priestly castes).

Thus there are in the present-day Newar caste system two separate castes at the highest level of ritual status with the traditional and hereditary occupation of being family priests. One of these Newar castes is Brahman and of course Hindu, serving all Hindu Newar families apart from the untouchables. The other is Buddhist and called Gubhaju, serving all Buddhist Newar families apart again from untouchables. The competitive relationship between these two castes forms one of the main themes of this essay because it is inextricably related to the whole question of status and social mobility.

Some further remarks are necessary on the social implications of this division of Newars as a whole into Hindus and Buddhists. It is very easy, if one is to judge by previous accounts of Newar society, to exaggerate the *social* importance of this division and indeed to suggest that a complete vertical barrier exists with Hindu castes ranged on one side and Buddhist castes on the other. This view, common in the literature, is quite wrong. On grounds of

religious belief and practice (certainly apart from the Brahmins on the one hand and the three leading Buddhist castes—Gubhaju, Bares and Uray, which I describe later, on the other) it is incredibly difficult if not impossible to identify the vast bulk of the Newar population as being either Hindu or Buddhist. The degree of religious syncretism is so complete that such a distinction on grounds of belief and ritual practice is out of the question—and it is important to note that this distinction is not generally made by the Newars themselves.

From the point of view of social behaviour, the most useful criterion to employ, as Haimendorf was the first to point out,⁶ in discerning Hindu from Buddhist is that of noting which family priest a particular family employs for its domestic rituals, a family which calls a Brahman being described as Hindu and a family which calls a Gubhaju being described as Buddhist. This is the criterion which Haimendorf uses in his brief survey of Newar society, but in employing it he makes two assumptions which later research has proved inaccurate—firstly, that all families of a particular caste will use the same kind of priest, either the Brahman or the Gubhaju, and secondly that a single family will use exclusively either the Brahman or the Gubhaju for all its domestic rituals. In fact some families of a particular caste may use a Brahman and some families *of the same caste* may use a Gubhaju, indicating that so far as these castes are concerned it is incorrect to describe them as being exclusively either Hindu or Buddhist. In the town of Sankhu, for example, in which I spent the greater part of my period of fieldwork, of 413 families of the Shrestha caste, some 30 families used a Gubhaju whilst the remainder used a Brahman. Similarly many Jyapu families in the same town used a Brahman whilst the vast majority of other families of this same caste used a Gubhaju family priest. Further, I noted many cases throughout the Kathmandu Valley of individual Newar families employing a Brahman for some of its domestic rituals and a Gubhaju for others within the same household (sometimes indeed both priests would be present at the same time). In certain conditions of status seek-

⁶ C. von Fürer-Haimendorf, 1956, p. 15-38. I am indebted to Professor Haimendorf for permitting me to see the manuscript of this preliminary account of Newar society before its publication and before my own fieldwork in Kathmandu. It was of great help to me in planning my initial inquiries.

ing—and this when elaborated later will be one of the main points of this essay—a family will deliberately change from its traditional practice of using a Gubhaju to that of using a Brahman (in theory the change could be the other way about but I observed no actual instances of this happening), and such a change is a matter for individual families to decide, never of a caste or caste segment as a whole. The fact that two families of the same caste may employ different priests, the one a Brahman and the other a Gubhaju (the former family being therefore Hindu and the latter Buddhist) does not for this reason mean that there exists any barrier whatsoever against intermarriage between them or any restrictions on general social intercourse. The same domestic rituals (initiation rites for boys and girls, marriage, funeral rites, etc.) would be performed by either priest though the form and symbolism of the rituals would of course vary slightly and both families would participate fully and equally in the common annual round of public and family ceremonies according to the Newar annual ritual cycle. These observations hold true whatever the actual caste of the families concerned.

While I hold it to be inaccurate and misleading to discuss Newar society in terms of a vertical social division into Hindu and Buddhist castes (this bifurcation occurring only at the highest level of ritual status), I do not therefore wish to imply that this religious distinction has no social importance whatsoever. In terms of family prestige and social standing it matters a great deal, as will emerge later. And this is largely because of the association of Hinduism with political power and dominance within the political system which obtained in the Kathmandu Valley and Nepal generally, up to the Revolution of 1950.

For almost two hundred years from 1768, when the invading Prithvin Narayan Shah overthrew the Malla kings and succeeded in establishing a Gurkha dynasty in Kathmandu, up to 1950, supreme political authority in the valley resided not with the numerically dominant Newars but with the alien Gurkha castes who were exclusively Hindu. Initially this new regime appears to have continued the policy of toleration of and avoidance of discrimination against the Newar Buddhist priests and families. But in 1846, as a result of a palace massacre, the Rana family and clan, a subdivision of the Parbatia Chetri or warrior caste, rose to supreme

political power. The Ranas, one of a number of ritually equal Chetri clans, appear to have sought to confirm their dominant and superior political status vis-à-vis their former Chetri peers by a policy of vigorous "Sanskritisation" and determined and fanatical Hinduism—a process which began under Jang Bahadur, the first Rana Maharaja and Prime Minister of Nepal, and increased in strictness and rigidity as successive Rana Maharajas took over supreme despotic power. The Newars found themselves in the position of a politically subject community, denied access to political power, compelled to pursue the favours of the Hindu Ranas for appointment to positions within the complex bureaucracy of the State, and with their rules of inter-caste behaviour legally regulated at the behest of the Rana (and on the advice of his Brahman high priest, the Raj Guru) and enforced by his courts with a strict insistence on the precepts of Brahmanical Hinduism. The Ranas utilized the ideology of caste to validate and reinforce their own political authority and to ensure the political stability of an absolute and autocratic despotism. Pudma Jung Bahadur Rana's biography of his father Jang Bahadur, the first Rana Maharaja and the exalted family hero of the Ranas, is liberally scattered with accounts of his generosity to Brahmans both Parbatia and Newar. The following extracts are typical:

"On the 12th of July, the Maharaja celebrated his birthday Learned Pandits were invited to take part in the ceremony, which was accompanied by the usual modes of rejoicing and acts of charity The Brahmans were feasted on a sumptuous scale and dismissed with rich presents"

"A few days later, the Maharaja made another gift of one thousand cows to Brahmans, at the junction of the Baghmati and Manohra—a confluence of waters specially recommended for gifts of this kind. Some months previously he had presented to the Brahmans a gold chariot and elephant weighing 500 tolas, or about 13 lbs., that must have cost him not less than Rs. 10,000. Such munificent, and almost heedless charity was very frequent with Jang Bahadur, who sometimes gave away to the priests sums that might well be called a monarch's ransom."⁷

⁷ Rana, Pudma Jung Bahadur—1909, p. 253 and 285.

I am not here concerned to discuss the most interesting and significant question of what Jang Bahadur and the Ranas got in return for this "monarch's ransom": my concern is with the effect of this conspicuous, and as we shall see later, often violent, support of Brahmanical prestige and ritual authority on the Newar caste system. This determined Hinduism had the effect of notably raising the prestige (and of course the tangible rewards) of the Hindu Newars in particular the Shrestha merchants and of depressing the status of Newar Buddhism particularly the Gubhaju priests. These Gubhaju family priests found themselves increasingly deserted by their *jajmans* for their more favoured and influential Brahman competitors. Since the loss or gain of *jajmans* has an important effect on the economic condition of a particular priest, and consequently on the economic condition of these two priestly castes as a whole, this competition had a sharp economic effect on this Buddhist community—a competition greatly affected by the fact that there are more than ten times as many Gubhaju families in the valley as there are Newar Brahmans, and hence losses of *jajmans* from Gubhajus are divided between few Brahman priests with a consequent substantial increase in the income of the latter. While the position of the Brahman, fundamentally through self-interested royal patronage, has been secured at the highest level, the Buddhist Gubhajus in terms of their general social prestige have long been standing on a slowly descending escalator—the speed of which sharply accelerated within the last three generations since the rise of the fanatically orthodox Ranas as the supreme political authority. This is the context and background against which we must read the facts on status and mobility within the Newar caste system: the specific and complex reactions of the Gubhaju priests to this situation will be discussed later in this essay.

It should be added here to complete this picture that, though it is certainly true that the two great cultural traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism co-exist in the Kathmandu Valley, it should not be thought that these traditions, so far as caste ideology is concerned, stand in sharp contrast to one another. The Buddhism of the Newars has long been dormant and decadent: only in the last decade since the arrival on the scene of parliamentary democracy in Nepal and the new wave of intellectual enthusiasm for the rejection of caste distinctions and untouchability, has Newar

Buddhism shown slight signs of a new energy and vitality—the political dominance of Hindu rulers having been overthrown with the rise of political parties and the introduction of the ballot box. Certainly one hears educated Newar Buddhists expressing vague notions of a casteless society on the Tibetan model but basically, and certainly during the Malla and more recent Rana regimes, Newar Buddhism in practice appears to have become so suffused with Hindu concepts of pollution and of caste order and precedence as to be practically indistinguishable from Brahmanical Hinduism. We are not in fact dealing with two distinct and contrasting social philosophies, the one expressing an ideology of caste inequality and discrimination, the other a rejection of this in favour of an “open”, casteless society based on individual merit and group equality. So far as it has had any effect at all on caste behaviour, the most that one can say is that Buddhism makes for a loosening of the rigidity of the caste ideology and for a tolerance, so far as permitted by the dominant Hindu authority, of transgressions of the rules of commensality and of caste endogamy. This question of the extent to which Newar caste behaviour can be related to what I will vaguely call “the general cultural atmosphere” arising from the co-existence of these two major traditions is most perplexing. In my view it is easy to exaggerate this factor but incredibly difficult to produce any objective evidence one way or the other. I am well aware that the mere mention of the term “Buddhism” will induce some scholars to accept at once that herein lies the full explanation of the flexibility of the Newar caste system and of the unusual incidence of social mobility. I can only record my view that such “explanations” are not warranted by the evidence, and are misleading.

THE NEWAR CASTES

Ignoring this distinction between Hindus and Buddhists for the moment (and recalling that this in any case apart from a special exception at the highest status level, is not a distinguishing characteristic of castes as wholes), the total Newar community is internally sub-divided into 26 castes (*jat*) each with a distinct name, an hereditary and traditional occupation or group of occupations (though such an occupation may not be exclusive to a particular

caste), preferentially but not exclusively endogamous, and each with a definite if not necessarily precise position in an overall hierarchy of dominance and subordination expressed in the symbolic language of ritual purity. These castes vary strikingly in their numerical size and complexity of internal organisation, and importantly in their degree of localisation or dispersal over the 33 Newar settlements in the Kathmandu Valley. I give this figure of 26 castes with very considerable hesitation : herein lies one of the major difficulties of exposition in most caste systems, certainly with the Newars. Most of the larger castes are further sub-divided internally into segments usually reproducing the diacritical exclusiveness of what I have called "castes" (namely, a distinctive name, a traditional occupation, preferential endogamy, and so forth). It is sometimes incredibly difficult to make a precise decision whether to classify such a named segment as a sub-caste and a sub-division of a larger entity, or as a separate caste on its own—and the Newars themselves will readily supply a welter of contradictory statements on this point. Too great a degree of precision on this point can easily distort the actual realities of the situation, when this precision must necessarily be arbitrary and a matter of fluctuating opinion among Newars themselves.

Take the case of the farming Jyapus (the largest of all Newar castes) and their relationship with the following groups : Kuma (potters), Khusa (palanquin bearers), and Tepe (also farmers and cultivators). Many of my informants from the latter groups claim that their particular group is simply a sub-division of Jyapus, with no explicit bars to intermarriage (the children simply following the sub-division of the father) and no barriers on commensality. Others admit a status differentiation and say such inter-marriages are rare. Equally many Jyapus deny equality in social intercourse to these three groups arguing that they are distinct castes of lower status, whilst other Jyapus (particularly those families who have been involved in cases of inter-marriage with these groups) argue a contrary opinion. And this opinion appears to vary importantly from community to community, Kathmandu Jyapus generally denying equality and identity of caste membership to Kuma and Tepe but tending to accept Khusa, whilst in Bhatgaon and the large neighbouring town of Thimi (the main centre of the potters) all three groups appear to be accepted vaguely as Jyapu sub-

divisions. No centralised authority exists for promulgating a definite decision on such a point, universal for all Newar communities, and any list of Newar castes could be challenged and questioned on this score. Similar observations could be made about the internal structure of the vast Shrestha caste or about the relationship between Gubhaju priests as a group on the one hand and the Bares—gold and silver smiths—on the other (both of which I examine later) or about the relationship between Duhim (and its sub-divisions of Putwar and Dali) and Balami.

Recognizing then that this list I give involves an arbitrary decision on my part in certain respects and that it may well give a false impression of social distance and distinctions, I offer below a table of Newar castes with an estimate in each case of its total number of households in the Kathmandu Valley—the figure given being compiled from an actual household census of caste membership which I conducted in 31 of the 33 Newar settlements together with estimates based on various sources of the caste composition of the remaining two—Kathmandu and Patan—which were too large for a household census in the time and with the resources available to me :

TABLE 1—NEWAR CASTES

<i>Caste</i>	<i>Traditional Occupation</i>	<i>Personal Surname</i>	<i>Total No. of Households</i>	<i>% of Total</i>
1. Deo Brahman	Family Priests	Raj Uphadhaya	165	0.5
2. Bhatta Brahman	Temple Priests	Bhatta	50	0.1
3. Jha Brahman	Temple Priests	Jha	150	0.4
4. Gubhaju	Family Priests	Vajracarya	3,700	10
Bare	Gold and Silver Smiths	Sakyabhikshu		
5. Shrestha (Sheshya)	Merchants	Shrestha, or Malla, Josi, Pradhan, Raj Bhandari, Maske, Raj Lawat, Amatya, Raj Vamsi and others.	8,100	21.4

TABLE 1—NEWAR CASTE—*cont.*

<i>Caste</i>	<i>Traditional Occupation</i>	<i>Personal Surname</i>	<i>Total No. of Households</i>	<i>% of Total</i>
6. Uray (Üdhas)	Merchants and Craftsmen	Tuladhar (merchants), Lohamka :mi (masons), Awa : (tilers), Sika :mi (carpenters), Madika :mi (confectioners), Tamrakar (coppersmiths), Kam-sakar (workers in alloys)	1,700	5
7. Jyapu	Farmers	Maharjan, Dangul, Suwal, Duwal, Sapu (cowherd), Kabhuja, Musa, Lawat, etc.	15,800	42
8. Kuma	Potters	Kumale, Prajapati	1,150	3.1
9. Saymi	Oilpressers	Manandhar	1,370	3.6
10. Khusa	Palanquin Bearers	Khusa, Tandukar	300	0.8
11. Nau	Barbers	Napit	410	1.1
12. Kau	Blacksmiths	Naka :mi	300	0.8
13. Bha	Funeral Duties	Karamjit, Bha	150	0.4
14. Gathu	Gardeners	Bammala, Mali	470	1.3
15. Tepe	Cultivators	Tepe	150	0.4
16. Pum	Painters	Citrakar	170	0.5
17. Duhim	Carriers	Putwar, Dali	130	0.4
18. Balami	Fieldworkers	Balami	50	0.1
19. Pulu	Funeral Torch Bearers	Pulu	100	0.3
20. Cipa	Dyers	Ramjitkar	430	1.2
21. Jogi	Musicians and Tailors	Kanphatta, Giri, Dom, Kusle, Danya	550	1.5
22. Nay	Butchers and Musicians	Kasain, Khadgi	1,050	2.8
23. Kulu	Drum-makers	Kulu	70	0.2
24. Pore	Fishermen and Sweepers	Pore, Deola	500	1.3
25. Chami	Sweepers	Chami, Camkhala	250	0.7
26. Halahulu	Sweepers	Halahulu	50	0.1
Total Number of Newar households			37,315	100%
Total Newar population			225,798	

From this table it can be seen that the single caste of Jyapus (certainly if the Kuma be included with them) constitutes just under half of the total Newar population, and that the four large castes of Jyapu, Shrestha, Gubhaju and Uray, which stand in varying positions just below the highest level of social status, together form just over 80 per cent of all Newar households. Practically all the remainder are by comparison small in size, eighteen of the remaining castes having under five hundred households each. I cannot now undertake a detailed discussion of the distribution of these castes over the thirty-three Newar settlements, but it is essential to emphasize that these factors of scale and demographic distribution of castes are fundamentally related to the caste morphology of the system as a whole and to the morphologies of individual settlements. Some castes like Jyapus and the lower artisan castes like Nau, Kau, and Cipa and untouchables such as Jogi and Nay tend to be widely dispersed over all or most of the Newar communities. Others like the merchant Shrestha and the priestly castes tend to be concentrated in the major towns—the Uray for example being almost exclusively concentrated in Kathmandu itself. This dispersal or concentration obviously has an important effect on caste interaction and on judgements of relative status. Individuals not unnaturally tend to have only the vaguest ideas about the precise position in the overall hierarchy of castes which do not appear in their own communities and neighbourhoods and with whom they may have little or no actual contact—and it is this fact among others, which leads to conflicting statements about the status positions of particular groups. But though they know little further about a particular caste, Newars as a whole can readily identify it through common knowledge as belonging to one or other of the two basic status divisions of Newar society—the “pure” castes on the one hand and the “impure” on the other.

In terms of the hierarchy of dominance and subordination, this division is fundamental—the first order of segmentation in fact. On the one hand stand the *la cale ju pim* (literally, “the ones from whom water can be taken”) : on the other, the *la cale ma ju pim* (“the ones from whom water cannot be taken”). In everyday speech, these terms are abbreviated to *ju pim* and *ma ju pim*. In the list given in Table 1 the *ju pim* are the first 20 castes in the table (93 per cent of the total Newar population), and the remainder,

castes 21 to 26, are the *ma ju pim*, the impure (7 per cent of the total).

It is usual to discuss such a caste system in terms of a single continuous hierarchy running from the Brahman at the top to the lowest caste of untouchables at the bottom. In my view, this is erroneous. Correctly we should speak of two orders of hierarchical segmentation—the first into two blocks of castes, *ju pim* and *ma ju pim*, the one collectively dominant, the other collectively subordinate. Each of these blocks is further sub-divided into a separate and internal hierarchy. The demarcation line—symbolized by the “water line” with the Newars—between the two blocks is clear, precise, immutable; internal change and jostling for status within the hierarchies on either side of this line does not affect this precision and immutability. For the castes in the subordinate block, those below the water line, this line represents the limit of possible upward mobility. What goes on above it in terms of internal change is irrelevant to them, as the change which may take place below the line is irrelevant to the castes in the dominant block so long as this change does not affect the basic pattern of collective dominance and subordination that exists between the two blocks. That is, the Newar caste system is essentially bisegmental in hierarchy even though each of these two segments has multiple divisions within it. (I believe this to be true of most Indian caste systems, certainly those in North India with which I am familiar). It is important to be accurate on this point if we are to produce an intelligible and realistic theory of caste interaction.

In Table 2 I give a rough and approximate picture of the relative social status in terms of caste stereotypes as expressed both verbally and in ritual behaviour by my Newar informants (accepting that a lack of precision in the internal hierarchies of either block, but not in the line dividing the blocks, is part of the essential nature of any caste system). The table in relation to the segmentation of the second order would of course be hotly disputed by individuals in all castes in either hierarchy with the sole exception of the Deo Brahman, accorded here the highest status position. Students of caste are well familiar with such disputes: they are an inherent characteristic of the dynamics of caste systems. The table is given merely as a rough guide so that the reader can follow the discussion which follows of social mobility within this system.

TABLE 2—APPROXIMATE RITUAL HIERARCHY IN TERMS OF CASTE STEREOTYPES

<i>First Order Segmentation</i>	<i>Second Order Segmentation Respectively</i>		
Dominant Block <i>(ju pim)</i>	Deo Brahman		
	Bhatta Brahman	Gubhaju	
	Jha Brahman	Bare	
	Shrestha	Uray	
	Jyapu		
	Kuma	Khusa	Tepe
	Saymi, Nau, Kau, Cipa, Gathu, Bha, Pum		
	Duhim	Balami	Pulu
Subordinate Block <i>(ma ju pim)</i>	Jogi	Nay	Kulu
	Pore		
	Chami	Halahululu	

First a further essential observation on the social identification of individuals in terms of caste membership. In a small community where everyone is personally known to everyone else, every individual's caste membership is a matter of common knowledge. But in the crowded streets of a large urban centre such as Kathmandu, or in the other large Newar towns (with a good deal of movement of population in and out of rented houses), in the courts, schools, hospitals, government offices, university, and so forth individuals meet not as life-long neighbours and acquaintances but often as strangers, fellow Newars indeed as is at once apparent by the distinctive Newar dress and language—but of what caste? From every Newar's personal name it is possible to identify his caste at once. Once his name is known he is no longer anonymous, simply a Newar: he becomes immediately identified as a member of a particular caste to whom one behaves with a certain deference and respect or alternatively with authority and superiority. Names

then have a particular importance in triggering off appropriate caste behaviour under certain circumstances common in an urban environment. We shall see later that this fact is of relevance to an examination of the process of upward mobility. In Table 1, I have given in each case the appropriate personal surname (or in some cases examples of surnames) that is customarily and exclusively used by individuals of the castes listed.

Through considerations of space I am omitting any attempt to provide a glossary of the full range of Newar castes and sub-castes. A description of each caste in turn would prove unnecessarily tedious. The relevant facts about the castes with which I am particularly concerned in this essay will emerge as the discussion proceeds.

INDIVIDUAL SOCIAL MOBILITY AMONG NEWARS

Though in the symbolic calibrations of ritual a caste group is essentially a group of peers, it may nevertheless, as I have noted earlier, contain individuals covering a wide range of status positions in terms of wealth, prestige, political power, education, occupations and so forth. And thus social mobility inside a particular caste both of individuals and family groups in terms of these factors is of course possible and widespread in caste systems. It would be easy to cite numerous case histories from the Kathmandu Valley (as from any caste society) to illustrate this type of individual upward or downward mobility. But this is already sufficiently familiar for this to be unnecessary in this essay. The real obstacles to upward progress arise when the limits of mobility within the range of a particular caste have been achieved and further advancement necessitates crossing the boundary into a higher caste. I put it this way, but it is actually more accurate to say that the problems arise when high economic and political status coupled with an individual's present "caste" or ritual position create a situation of marked status inconsistency and acute role conflict. A well-to-do individual conscious of his superior power in relation to his caste peers will if circumstances permit seek to translate his achieved status into the familiar and traditionally-accepted idiom of the appropriate and correlated ritual position. To do this he has to quit his former peer group, normally of course in a caste system by forming with other well-to-do individuals a new peer group recruited

out of the old through fission. If he decides to "go it alone" he is faced with the normally insurmountable obstacle of endogamy: no matter what his aspirations to a higher ritual status he will find that a caste higher in the scale will not provide him or his sons with wives, even though it may with impunity accept his daughters into hypergamous unions. Equally the rules of commensality will operate to frustrate his ambitions. The ideology of caste is heavily weighted against the ambitious *parvenu*. So indeed the argument normally goes, caste scholars—heavily supported by the evidence from small scale rural societies in India—having satisfied themselves that such upward mobility across caste lines is impossible, marriage being treated as the crucial test, except of course for the occasional trickster who "passes" by successful cheating (such rare exceptions merely "proving the rule").⁸

But this is by no means the whole story, and it is certainly not an accurate statement of the situation as regards the Newars. In a recent notable account of inter-caste and inter-ethnic unions among Chetris and Newars in Nepal, Haimendorf points to numerous examples of socially-advantageous alliances leading to the confirmation of a higher caste status for individuals and concludes that "In Nepal the individual can follow a solitary path of social advancement by means of favourable unions".⁹ While accepting that this statement, under certain conditions only, is true of Newars, I want to show that this process of individual advancement is a good deal more complicated than would appear if we consider the evidence of marriage alone. The *context* of these "favourable unions" is in fact more significant than are the unions themselves, considered on their own.

Let me put it this way. In any system of stratification, the *process* of individual mobility would seem to involve four distinct steps (ignoring for the moment the question of motivation and the material support and backing which makes entry into this process at least feasible and reasonable):

1. A public claim to equality with persons of higher status.
2. Modification or adjustment of behaviour to conform with that current among the higher status group aspired to.

⁸ Yalman, Nur—1960, p. 99.

⁹ Fürer-Haimendorf, C. von—1960, p. 25.

3. Rejection of former peers of lower status and severance or minimisation of interaction with them.
4. Acceptance by the higher status group demonstrated and confirmed by social interaction with them on terms of equality.

When all four steps have been completed, we can speak of successful social advancement in a particular case, but a lapse of time is essentially involved and we must recognize that the completion of the process may take years, even more than a single generation. It depends on the circumstances in individual cases. Further we will no doubt find examples in any stratified system, where such mobility occurs, of individuals who stand at different stages in the process, perhaps having managed the first two or three but who have not yet achieved the fourth. And it is this final stage acceptance, which is obviously critical and the most difficult for the social climber to accomplish. This is his summit. He can reach it in one of two ways—by persuading and inducing the higher status group into ignoring his lower social origins, “the base degrees by which he did ascend”, in the words of Cassius, or by successfully deceiving them on this score.

Among Newars this process of individual mobility across the barriers of caste occurs predominantly and commonly at a particular point in the scale (at the point separating the large merchant caste of Shresthas from the even larger farming caste of Jyapus who come immediately below them in the scale of ritual precedence) though it is not confined to this point.

It is at this point in the scale that a sudden and sharp contrast in caste stereotype occurs. The stereotype of the Shrestha is that of the well-to-do merchant, clean, well-dressed, highly literate, well-mannered and well-educated, fastidious, cultured, essentially urban in outlook and orientation: the stereotype of the Jyapu is that of a mud-bespattered fieldworker, poor, rough in manner and speech, illiterate, essentially a peasant and a “worker”. Fundamentally, the line between Shrestha and Jyapu is the line between white-collar occupations (the non-manual “middle class”) on the one hand and the manual “working class” occupations on the other, between commerce and agriculture, between town and village, between U and Non-U (in the recent jargon of English social class).

But in practice, many Shresthas particularly in the smaller communities fall well below this stereotype—they are poor, barely literate, working as tenants on the rice fields of either more wealthy absentee Shrestha landlords or of landlords of other castes including wealthy Jyapus, indistinguishable in dress, and manner, in relative poverty of housing and culture from individuals from castes standing ritually below them in the hierarchy of the *ju pim* block. And there is constant evidence in behaviour, notably in their often desperate insistence on the meticulous observance of rules of pollution, that they are by no means unaware of and insensitive to this contrast between their own social and economic condition and that of the Shrestha stereotype in general. Equally many Jyapus—in contradistinction to the Jyapu stereotype—are prosperous landowners and shopkeepers employing tenants to do all their fieldwork, with their wives expensively dressed in fashionable saris, well-educated, with their sons at college, or employed as clerks or school-teachers or important officials in the elaborate State bureaucracy, or nowadays as Ministers or leading members of political parties. And it is these urbanite Jyapus, exhibiting this high degree of inconsistency in their "status profiles", who are candidates for upward mobility in caste terms, who press their claim for a ritual position commensurate with their economic power and social prestige.

The continual process of social and economic change in this metropolitan region of Kathmandu (the provision of easily available educational facilities, Trichandra College being opened by the Ranas in 1918, the rapid elaboration of the government bureaucracy under the Ranas, the increasing prosperity of Kathmandu as a trading and commercial centre) continued throughout the period of the Rana regime, accelerating rapidly in the final decades and sharply and suddenly since the Revolution of 1950 with the advent of the new era of political parties, planning commissions, foreign aid, and the like. This cumulative change affected all Newar castes in varying degrees—the Shrestha merchants of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhatgaon particularly, both in terms of commerce and in the fact that they were extensively recruited by the Rana rulers as clerks and officials within the Singha Durbar, the Government secretariat, and other Government offices. The Rana, briefly, used the warrior Chetri and Parbatia castes to man his police

and army and the highest positions of State authority, and the Newars to man his bureaucracy. But not only Shresthas benefited educated Jyapus and Saymis and Urays and others of the *ju pim* block succeeded, in comparatively small numbers, in getting employment in "Government service" (apart from independent advancement in commercial enterprises) and sometimes found themselves in positions of authority over Shresthas, or at least in positions of equality. And throughout this period, there is evidence of individual Jyapus and others transforming themselves into Shresthas and securing a ritual confirmation of their social status achieved through these channels of educational and economic and occupational mobility.

The steps in this process of caste transformation, taking the case of the individual Jyapu, are as follows: Firstly they drop their former Jyapu surname and take to calling themselves "Shrestha". Prayag Raj Dangul, for example, a Jyapu will take to giving his name as Prayag Raj Shrestha on his appointment as a clerk in the Singha Durbar, and have this name entered into the departmental records and so forth. I noted many instances of this in conversation and in the recording of genealogies of Jyapus and lower castes in Kathmandu, where the informant giving the name of a particular relative would suddenly say with a chuckle (but not also without a noticeable respect and pride): "O, he calls himself So-and-So Shrestha: he's a deputy secretary in the Finance Department (or whatever)". Young men who had changed their names in this way said they did so to avoid being snubbed and ridiculed by their multitude of Shrestha colleagues in Government Offices. "If you give your name as Dangul or Maharjan, they mock you for being a Jyapu fieldworker. 'Have you brought your hoe with you this morning?' and that kind of thing. If you call yourself 'Shrestha', nobody knows whether this is correct or not, and in any case there are many others doing the same as you are". This change of name occurs also with traders and schoolmasters and lawyers and politicians and so forth. Of course in many cases it is simply a form of temporary avoidance behaviour, appropriate to the specific situations in which status or role conflict is likely to occur, and without any permanent significance for the individuals concerned. The "Shrestha" in the Singha Durbar may well go home at night to his kin and his family ceremonies and so forth and revert to

being a Jyapu again. But it can be and often is the first essential stage in a complex process of upward mobility in terms of the ritual idioms of caste.

The second stage is the copying of the customary cultural behaviour diacritically distinctive of the Shresthas as a caste group. Fundamental here is the distinction between Hinduism and Buddhism to which I have earlier referred. By the criterion of which of the two available classes of family priest that they use, the Shresthas are predominantly Hindu in using Brahmans whilst the Jyapus are predominantly Buddhist in using Gubhajus. The social climbing Jyapu will simply cease to call his traditional hereditary Gubhaju and call instead the status-giving Brahman. There is no practical difficulty here—the Gubhaju cannot come if he is not called (and thus the relationship is easily severed since the essential alternative priest is available), and the Brahman, anticipating his priestly fees, will come at once when called. But the Brahman is well aware of his status-giving function, confident and secure in the power and patronage with which the Rana rulers indulged him, and he makes his new client pay heavily for the privilege of his priestly services. To get the Brahman is easy, to keep him costs money. The fees and gifts (particularly on the occasions of the *sraddhas* following deaths, which are notable occasions of public and conspicuous and competitive consumption between families) extorted by prosperous Deo Brahmans from these Newar status-seekers far outweigh what the poor Gubhaju would be content with. And herein lies a fundamental economic check on this form of status mobility. Turning Hindu brings the social climber tangible rewards in status and prestige (and in ease of promotion in the fanatical Hinduism of the Rana regime) but it is beyond the economic means of all except the wealthier Jyapus wishing to translate their wealth and positions of authority into the idiom of caste status.

Turning Hindu in this way is associated with a general tightening up of observances of rules of ritual avoidance—a stricter application of the concepts of pollution, greater care and punctiliousness in following the prescriptions of commensality and the restrictions associated with food, and equally with the requirements of caste endogamy. "Caste consciousness", that is, concern with the practical applications of the ritual concepts of the ideology of caste, is by no means evenly distributed over the Newar caste system as a

whole (this of course is true of all caste systems though it is a fact which is commonly and significantly ignored in most existing discussions). It becomes most extreme at those points in the scale where there is most to be gained from care in this respect. In the Newar system, it is the Shresthas who exhibit the keenest concern with caste rules, understandably because it is with them that the keenest competition for status occurs. New "Shresthas" (Jyapus or others seeking acceptance of this new ritual position) must be above suspicion in this respect. It is in their interests to assert the rules publicly and energetically, and to be overtly scornful of laxity in this connection among their former peers and amongst lower castes generally. Hence becoming "Shrestha" involves a rigorous programme of "Sanskritisation" in personal behaviour, imitating the Brahmanical model—as for example, in observing a thirteen day period of ritual impurity after death instead of the normal ten days of the Jyapu, or in refusing cooked rice from any hand except that of the Brahman himself, or in observing expensive Hindu ceremonies which lower castes ignore.

The third essential stage in this process is rejection of former peers of lower status. A Jyapu en route to becoming a Shrestha must quit Jyapu associations and seek membership of Shrestha associations. And here we come to another economic check on this process. Among Newars there is an ubiquitous form of voluntary association known as a *guthi*. These are common interest groups with restricted recruitment, and there are a whole range of different types of *guthi* (those concerned with the maintenance of particular shrines or temples for example, those for the worship of the ancestral deities of particular families, those for a special form of charity, and so forth). I propose to deal in detail with these Newar associations on another occasion: for the moment I am particularly concerned with one particular association, known as a *sanam guthi*. All Newar males must belong to a *sanam guthi* and all members of a single *guthi* of this type must belong to the same caste. A *sanam guthi* is a kind of funeral society basically. On the death of one of its members, or of any adult within his household, the members of the *guthi* as a whole are expected to turn out to walk in the funeral procession to the burning ground. It is a fairly common sight in Kathmandu to see such funeral processions of males winding through the street, the size of the procession depending on how

large was the *guthi* to which the deceased belonged. And all the men in the procession would belong to one caste. But any one caste would contain many such funeral associations with memberships ranging from fifteen or twenty in the smallest cases to several hundred in the largest. A man may quit one *guthi* at any time (should he change his residence, for example) and join another, if the members of the latter will accept him into fellowship. Brothers on partition from the parental household may well cease membership of one *guthi* for that in another where they prefer the company or expect greater benefits. Each *guthi* has a senior member and an organising committee. Each *guthi* requires an annual cash subscription from its members, and an entrance fee from new members, the amounts varying according to the general economic condition of members of a particular *guthi*. In addition to the obligation of turning out for the funerals of fellow members, each individual member has the privilege of attending the annual feast paid for out of the funds. And he may in some cases borrow money at favourable rates of interest, or no interest at all, from the *guthi* funds. Wealthy *guthis* may own land and considerable property, the income of which is used for these feasts and loans.

These funeral associations are found throughout all Newar castes with the proviso that a Nau must belong to a Nau *guthi*, a Pum to a Pum *guthi*, a Jyapu to a Jyapu *guthi*, a Shrestha to a Shrestha *guthi*, and so on. At first sight this rule of *guthi* membership would seem an insuperable obstacle to the social climber seeking acceptance as a member of a caste higher than that into which he was born. But it can be circumvented, provided he has the financial means and has completed the two stages in upward mobility which I have described earlier.

A man of Jyapu origin claiming to be a Shrestha will apply for membership of a Shrestha *sanam guthi*, offering a substantial entrance fee far in excess of that normally required by the rules of the *guthi*. As we shall see in a moment the Shrestha caste as a whole is sub-divided into a number of internal status grades. Each of these grades has its collection of *sanam guthi*. Such an aspirant would stand no chance of being accepted by the highest grade of Shresthas but a very good chance, if he is wealthy and conforms to the Shrestha stereotype described earlier, of being accepted by one of the funeral associations of the lower grades.

If of sufficient prestige and economic status, he can persuade the members of one of these *guthis* to accept him to their company. And he will not be the first to apply in this way, with cash in hand. The members of such an association of the lowest Shrestha grade will of course be careful to avoid any publicity which would reflect on their own status, nor would they easily accept anyone from a caste lower than Jyapu. And the new recruit must of course call himself a Shrestha, conform to Shrestha dress and culture, use a Brahman priest, and have rejected his lower social origins. Having thus got a foot on the Shrestha ladder, the individual status seeker could conceivably secure later on membership of higher grade Shrestha funeral associations, and, providing "good" marriages have been arranged, his sons are certainly likely to do so if they have the requisite wealth, prestige and a high occupational position.

Finally we come to the ultimate obstacle—marriage. But by this stage of the process the scene is set for the arrangement of the "favourable alliances" which will set the seal of success on this programme of individual social advancement. To achieve his goal, the new "Shrestha" must obtain Shrestha daughters for his sons, or of course a bride for himself, and give his daughters equally to Shresthas in return. The latter does not provide any great difficulty since hypergamous unions are a common feature of caste systems. But he wants, not a hypergamous union for his daughters, but unions of which the children will be accorded Shrestha, not Jyapu, status.

Early on in my fieldwork among Newars, I recall discussing with a *lami*, a marriage broker employed in all castes to carry out the arrangement on behalf of the parents for the marriage of a son and daughter respectively, the kinds of enquiries she made for the parents about caste status, other alliances in the families concerned, economic condition and so forth. She said "There's only one important question to be answered. What *guthis* does the family belong to?" This is the test of status by association. It is not what the family claims to be that counts: it is who will accept them as equals, as ritual peers. All my subsequent inquiries tended to confirm the importance of this question of the Newar *lami*. No matter how wealthy a Jyapu the chances of his getting a Shrestha bride for his son are nil so long as he continues to call himself a Jyapu, to belong to Jyapu funeral associations, and to behave

culturally as a Jyapu. And if such a Jyapu succeeds in marrying off his daughter to a Shrestha, the marriage will be a simple hypergamous alliance with the children of the union being classed as Jyapus (though it is true that these children through their paternal Shrestha associations will stand a fair chance of success themselves if they claim as adults to be Shresthas and embark on the process of mobility described above). But the Jyapu who calls himself Shrestha and has bought his way into a Shrestha association can indeed secure Shrestha marriages for his children, and have his grandchildren accorded Shrestha status. Men in this position commonly exploit the wide status difference that exists between the major towns and the smaller villages. He will hunt out a poorer Shrestha family in one of the smaller communities and use his wealth to persuade this family to give him a bride for his son : the Shrestha family will gain rather than lose prestige by such a marriage because it will be presented in their own community as a good and highly desirable match—a wealthy “Shrestha” from the town, of assured prestige and position, undisputed member of a Shrestha *sanam Guthi*, for their daughter. This status differential between town and village is an important factor in the arrangement of such marriages. And of course, failing a Shrestha bride of assured status, the new “Shrestha” can always secure a marriage with other new “Shresthas” in a similar position to himself, and hope for better luck with later marriages within the family. What he must not do is to give his daughter to a Jyapu or accept a Jyapu daughter for his son—such marriages with his former caste peers would immediately affect his claim to be a Shrestha and cause his expulsion from the Shrestha *sanam Guthi* to which he has been admitted.

The process of individual mobility between the Jyapu and Shrestha castes which I have outlined above is sufficiently common among Newars for it to be a constant theme of discussion, and for numerous examples to be cited in conversation. It is of course extremely difficult to obtain evidence on the incidence of this mobility, precisely because its success depends on secrecy and on a denial that such mobility has ever taken place. The process is possible because, firstly, the Shresthas have no sanctions available to prevent individual Jyapus of wealth and substance from undertaking such actions if they so desire ; secondly, because the process develops a sort of “snowballing” character as more and more Jyapus

embark on it (and the more cases that occur, the more impossible is it for Shresthas to apply the rule of endogamy as a protective barrier—the new “Shresthas” simply marry and form funeral associations amongst themselves); and thirdly, because the scale and urban concentration of the society and complexity of internal structure of both the Shrestha and Jyapu castes give sufficient individual anonymity to make the accurate social identification of any individual extremely difficult. Fundamentally it is possible because enough wealthy individuals from lower castes have embarked upon it to provide a blurring of the boundary line that demarcates the Shrestha caste by the complicating of the tests of marriage and social acceptance.

It is one matter to recognise the existence of this process in Newar society and quite another to demonstrate the scale on which it occurs. This is an exceptionally difficult fieldwork problem which I found impossible to solve satisfactorily. It is a phenomenon which occurs mainly in the major towns particularly Kathmandu and Bhatgaon rather than in the smaller communities, precisely because these latter do not afford the necessary anonymity that is essential to success. But the scale of these towns represents a formidable fieldwork problem, apart from the problem of obtaining frank and accurate information on such an essentially secretive process of social deception.

However I made some attempt at this problem in the large Newar town of Bhatgaon, and I offer below a brief picture of the situation there which gives some indication of the scale of upward mobility across the line separating the Shrestha from the Jyapu. The method I used was as follows: I completed a household census of all the 24 *tols* or neighbourhoods into which the town is divided, recording the full name and address of the head of the household and the familiar nickname (*benam*) by which each Newar family commonly is described. With these details of identification, I consulted the Brahman and Gubhaju family priests living in Bhatgaon and providing priestly services for these families. Going through my lists *tol* by *tol*, I asked the priests familiar with the *tol* concerned to allocate the families involved to their respective castes and to the named status grades within castes. I am concerned here only with the Shrestha and Jyapu castes out of the total of seventeen Newar castes in Bhatgaon, and with the total households of these

two castes, numbering 4,762 out of a total of 6,293 households in the town as a whole. The priests frequently disagreed amongst themselves in their judgements of status: in such cases, I have taken the majority opinion in the table below.

TABLE 3—STRUCTURE OF SHRESTHA AND JYAPU CASTES IN BHATGAON

<i>Caste</i>	<i>Status Grade</i>		<i>No. of Households</i>
SHRESTHA	A	Chathare	437
	A/B	doubtful A status	174
	B	Panchthare	340
	C	Charthare	266
		Sarhetinthare	
	D	"Shrestha"	155
Total Shresthas			1,372
JYAPU	A	Jyapu claiming "Shrestha" status	242
	B	Jyapu	2,645
	C	Sikami (carpenters)	198
	D	Kuma (potters)	305
Total Jyapus			3,390

I cannot pretend that, particularly with grades of the Shrestha caste and with the top grade of Jyapus, the allocation of household to grades is anything more than approximate. Doubtless this allocation would be sharply and heatedly questioned by most of the individual families concerned. But it does give a useful picture of status differentiation seen from the relatively unbiased viewpoint of the priestly castes. Whatever the position of an individual family within this structure of precedence, certainly these status grades do exist and are constantly and commonly used in conversation. The terms, Chathare, Panchthare, Charthare and Sarhetin-

thare, used to denote the grades of Shrestha are Nepali terms not Newari: they mean literally "Six Clans", "Five Clans", "Four Clans", and "Three and a Half Clans" respectively, and it is not at all clear to Newars themselves why these particular terms are used. I have heard it offered as one possible explanation that when the Gurkha invaders arrived the Newar Shresthas claimed equivalent status with the incoming warrior Chetri caste, and that "Chathare" is in fact a kind of popular Newar corruption of "Chetri". Be this as it may, certainly the Chathare Shresthas (those who use the surnames of Malla, Raj Vamsi, Maske, Raj Bhandari, Josi and so forth) claim and enjoy the highest status among Shresthas, and use the term "Chathare" commonly and openly to describe themselves. They carefully restrict their marriages to families of their own status, and also their funeral associations. The terms for the other grades merely mean a lower than Chathare status, the smaller the numeral the lower the grade. I have heard Shrestha families referring to themselves occasionally as Panchthare (this, I hasten to say, usually means that they actually belong to the grades lower than Panchthare but are claiming this higher position) but the other terms are used only perjoratively in reference and then privately when members of the families being referred to are not within earshot.

The group that I have described in the table as "Shrestha" is formed of those whose origin is extremely doubtful. They are only barely distinguishable if at all from the topmost grade of Jyapus in the table. These are all families at different stages of the process of upward mobility in caste terms. Collectively the lower grades of Shrestha (C and D in my table) are derogatively referred to as *chipi*, *bagha*: *Sheshya* ("half-Shrestha") or *lawat* (literally, "half-caste")—and sometimes equally derogatively with the prefix of a village name—e.g. "Thimi Shresthas" or "Thoka Shrestha"—with reference to the fact that many villagers migrating into the towns and bettering themselves economically take to calling themselves Shresthas.

I have said that Chathare Shresthas use special surnames such as Malla and Josi and so forth. But there are many examples of individuals calling themselves Malla, or Pradhan or by one or other of these well-known Chathare surnames who would certainly not be accepted as Chathares by others in this grade. The same

process of name changing, status claiming, seeking membership of funeral associations, searching for favourable marriage alliances, occurs at this point within the Shrestha caste as at its lower limits.

What is the effect of all this doubt and uncertainty about status and about the bona fides and credentials of caste fellows on the behaviour of members of this Shrestha caste? If two Newars meet as strangers, a common question is "*Chiguthar su?*" (literally, "what is your lineage?") This is the polite way of asking a person's caste: only to an untouchable is the word *jat* used in this question). On being told that it is Jyapu, or Gubhaju, or Pum, or any one of the Newar castes other than Shrestha, the question is followed up with the normal conversational exchanges about what town or village the person comes from, who he married, what his relatives do, and so forth—the usual conversation providing the information of social identification. But not if the reply is "Shrestha". "If a man says he is Shrestha (or Malla, Josi, and so forth), we never ask any further questions. It might prove very embarrassing" said Newar informants to me on many occasions, and my observations supported it.

This doubt and uncertainty and embarrassment has led to an almost complete collapse of caste solidarity amongst Shresthas—certainly the prevalent suspicion and lack of co-operation inside this caste is in marked contrast with the situation inside all other Newar castes. And with Shresthas a significant modification in the rules of commensality has occurred which well illustrates the mutability of ritual behaviour to conform with social realities. In all other Newar castes, at feasts and ceremonies cooked rice is served and eaten together by the caste fellows present. But at Shrestha feasts, when only Shresthas are present, only dry, pressed rice is served and eaten. Pressed rice may be eaten from the hands of any caste, even untouchables. No Shrestha will eat cooked rice in the house of another Shrestha, "even that of his own brother" I was told on countless occasions. The recruitment of new Shresthas by upward mobility from the Jyapu and lower castes of the *ju pim* hierarchy has been sufficiently common—not just the rare and exceptional trickster—to cause a disintegration of Shrestha caste cohesion at all levels and a zealous, meticulous, defensive concern with personal observance of the rules of pollution lest the finger of

suspicion be pointed and the voice of gossip and rumour uncover real or imaginary skeletons in the family cupboard.

Not directly involved except as a status symbol, but happily benefiting in the background from the increased wealth and prestige that this social climbing lower in the scale has brought him, stands the Brahman. Few in number in the Kathmandu Valley, the substantial increase in *jajmans* as status seeking Newars turn to them from the Gubhajus has made the Brahmans prosperous and, confident in their prestige, increasingly authoritative with their clients and contemptuous of their Buddhist counterparts. The relatively impoverished Gubhajus have steadily declined in prestige and morale as the Brahmans have prospered. The tendency to use Brahmans instead of Gubhajus has been for the last three generations since the rise of the Ranas steadily increasing downwards through the scale of Newar castes. Formerly, except for the Chathare Shresthas, the priests of the Newars were the Gubhajus. In the small town of Sankhu at the turn of the century, as I saw from Gubhaju records, only 10 out of 400 Shrestha families used a Brahman priest. All the remaining Shresthas and all the other castes except untouchables used Gubhajus as family *purohits*. Today less than 30 of the 400 odd Shrestha families in Sankhu still use Gubhajus, and already Jyapu families are turning to Brahmans. Fifty years ago Brahmans had only 10 client families in Sankhu, now they have more than 400—all of course gains from the Gubhaju. And this in a small, outlying, community relatively remote from the fierce status competition of the major towns.

The reactions of the Gubhajus to this situation of a declining income and prestige have been exceptionally interesting and I discuss them at length, as my example of group social mobility among Newars, in the section which follows. I deal here with a series of disputes inside the Newar Buddhist castes, clearly related directly to the effects of the incidence of individual social mobility within and into the Shrestha caste on the status of the Gubhaju. I present it as a case study of an attempt by group action, to halt and reverse a process of downward social mobility. It is given in detail because it is both relevant to the main theme of this essay and revealing as regards the internal structure of an important segment of Newar society.

THE COLLAPSE OF A NEWAR TRADE UNION: A CASE STUDY IN DOWNWARD GROUP MOBILITY

In 1923 a Tibetan lama called Yangtse came to Kathmandu and settled in Kindol Baha near the great Buddhist stupa of Swayambhu on the western edge of the city. This in itself was not a particularly unusual event but it proved to have far-reaching consequences. During the two years or so that he remained there, his fame as a holy man and expounder of the Doctrine spread throughout the Kathmandu Valley and people of all castes came to Kindol Baha in increasing numbers to see him and to hear him preach. By all accounts he seems to have aroused a new enthusiasm among large numbers of those Newars who professed to be Buddhist by religion, and he began to gather around him in Kindol Baha a small group of active and celibate Newar monks, from various castes, inspired by his example and teaching.

Not unnaturally as time passed the activities of this Tibetan lama and the enthusiastic response of a growing Newar audience attracted the attention and anger of the current Rana maharaja, Chandra Shamsher. His hostility is fully understandable. Firstly he was a staunch Hindu totally committed to the Brahmanical concepts of a caste society and therefore strongly opposed to active Buddhism of the Tibetan type with its implied rejection of the caste order. (The dormant and decadent Buddhism of the Newars appears to have caused him or earlier rulers no great concern.) And secondly, Chandra Shamsher like his predecessors from Jang Bahadur onwards was a despot with absolute power supported by tyrannical force and as such fundamentally opposed to change of any kind and to new ideas and practices from any source likely to disturb the apathy of the populace. Whatever his motives in this particular instance, Chandra Shamsher took decisive action to remove the source of irritation. Prompted no doubt by his Raj Guru—a Parbatia Brahman and the chief spiritual authority in Nepal—he ordered the Tibetan lama to leave the Valley, and sent his police to expel the eight or ten Newar monks—by caste these included four Saymis, one Shrestha, one Uray, one Bare, and one Chipa—from Nepal. He further pronounced all those Newars who had bowed their heads to the lama and who had eaten food distributed by him and his assistants following gatherings at Kindol

Baha as impure and ordered them to undergo the standard Hindu purificatory ritual known as *patia* at the direction of the Raj Guru.

This purification ritual is of interest as it indicates the general orientation of ideas under the Rana regime. Though it is of course an ancient Hindu rite, it was only made compulsory and legally enforceable from the time of Jang Bahadur onwards. According to the legal code drawn up by Jang Bahadur, any Nepalese citizen returning to his home after a journey abroad (other than to India) had to go to the Raj Guru to obtain permission and directions for performing *patia*. The actual ritual was carried out by the family *purohit*—whether a Brahman or a Gubhaju—the Raj Guru first deciding the degree of elaboration of the rite and the number of days it should last. The law laid down that a man returning from Tibet had to perform a *patia* lasting five days and pay a fee of six and a half rupees to the Raj Guru: this was the maximum—at the other end of the scale was a fee of a half rupee and the performance of *patia* lasting one day for a man returning from a journey to a trading post on the Tibeto-Nepal frontier. This law primarily affected two categories of persons—Gurkha soldiers returning from service overseas with the Indian Army, and Newar traders returning from Tibet. The majority of the latter were men of the Uray caste—a composite caste of merchants and craftsmen of generally high economic status through their predominance in the trade with Tibet, and of all Newar castes the one which is by far the strongest in devotion to Buddhist beliefs and practices according to the Tibetan model, largely of course through their close and continuing association with Tibetans in the course of trade.

There is no doubt that these prominent Newar Buddhists strongly resented the introduction of a law making it necessary for them to go to the Hindu and non-Newar Raj Guru for purification on return from Tibet. And indeed, recognising the fact that Nepal under the Ranas had a multiplicity of laws but a somewhat chaotic machinery of law enforcement, these Uray traders appear to have returned quietly to their homes and ignored this regulation about purification. Other Newars, less ready to make an issue of religious principles and perhaps fearing more the threat of the Maharaja rather than the efficiency of his police, appear to have obeyed the law and to have taken *patia* at the Raj Guru's direction. This

certainly is what happened on this occasion when Chandra Shamsher ordered those Newars who had been to Kindol Baha to undergo the purificatory ritual. Large numbers of Newars went immediately to the Raj Guru : those of the Uray caste, and there were many of this caste among the devotees of the Tibetan Lama at Kindol Baha, quietly but firmly refused to undergo a Hindu rite which they held to be a complete contradiction of their religious principles.

The Tibetan lama appears not only to have upset the Maharaja but, perhaps more importantly in relation to subsequent events, he aroused the resentment of the Gubhajus—particularly the Gubhajus of Kathmandu itself, most of the lama's audiences being drawn from the city—who undoubtedly saw the lama's popularity and prestige as a teacher and man of sanctity as undermining their own position and authority as the traditional religious leaders and family priests of Newar Buddhists. But there was very much more to it than this as we shall see later. These Gubhajus clearly approved of Chandra Shamsher's actions (and may indeed have brought the whole matter to his attention through the Raj Guru) and went about persuading their *jajmans* (the families for whom they held the hereditary right of performing priestly services) to obey the Rana's order and go to the Raj Guru for purification if they had been to Kindol Baha. Prominent among their *jajmans* in Kathmandu were the wealthy Uray merchants (the Uray as a community are almost entirely concentrated in Kathmandu itself) and though the Gubhajus pressed them to undergo the purification, the Uray took not the slightest notice. And thus began a series of bitter disputes which were to have profound consequences with regard to inter-caste behaviour among the leading Newar Buddhist castes.

In 1926 shortly after the departure of the Tibetan lama and the banishment of the Newar monks, the Gubhajus of Kathmandu held a special meeting with some three hundred persons present (the total number of Gubhaju families in Kathmandu being just under four hundred). By an overwhelming majority of those present a resolution—written down and signed by those who agreed—was passed which began as follows : "We have been taking food from Uray but conditions have now changed. To maintain the Gubhaju's prestige and authority over society, we should not take food from Urays. Those who violate this rule will be expelled

from the caste". (By 'food' the Gubhajus were here referring specifically to cooked rice : among Newars it is cooked rice alone which is involved in the symbolism of caste status so far as commensality is concerned—other foods, including parched rice, may be eaten freely by persons of different castes together without any implications of equality of status). Some of the Gubhaju's present opposed this resolution vehemently on the grounds that it would inevitably involve them in a severe dispute with their Uray *jajmans* and would create caste prejudices where none existed. The leading opponents were Subha Ratna ("a very learned man") and Indra-chudramani both of Asan Baha, one of the main *viharas* of Kathmandu.

A week or two later the annual *Bare guthi* meeting occurred in Jya Baha. (The Gubhajus and Bares of Kathmandu—the complex relationship between Gubhajus and Bares is to be considered later—number in all just over eleven hundred families and are divided into four associations, each called a *Bare guthi* and each meeting annually in a different *vihara* for a feast). At this meeting a violent quarrel occurred ending in the expulsion from the *guthi* of Subha Ratna and eight other Gubhajus who supported him. Subha Ratna is said to have felt angry and humiliated at being thus outcasted, and a few days later he filed a case in the court against ten prominent Gubhajus—from various *viharas* all over Kathmandu—who had taken the leading part in framing the resolution which he opposed. In his petition¹⁰ Subha Ratna wrote: "From time immemorial we Gubhajus have been taking cooked rice from our Uray *jajmans*. In the Samek¹¹ ceremony,

¹⁰ I was fortunate in seeing either the originals or copies of submissions made to the courts during this series of legal actions. Where I give direct quotations, as in this instance, they are in each case from translations—from Nepali—of the documents now in the possession of persons, or their heirs, involved in these cases.

¹¹ The Samek is a religious ceremony held regularly every twelve years, and whenever a wealthy man offers, as an act of merit, to pay the expenses of the feasts involved (expenses which may well run to well over half a lakh of rupees). It is held on the open meadow just below the hill of Swayambhu and is attended by all Gubhajus, Bare and Uray and by many invited dignitaries and officials. All the Dipankara Buddhas of the *viharas* are paraded and worshipped, and a great feast is held. If an individual gives the Samek ceremony, he thereby acquires tremendous public prestige—as well as untold religious merit—and usually adds the word "Samek" to his name.

it is the Uray who cook the rice and distribute it among the Gubhajas and Bares present. The very resolution passed admits that we have always taken food from Uray. Among Buddhists the question of high and low caste does not arise because caste does not exist. So the Court is requested to restore to me the right to be included in my society and to punish those who expelled me."

The Gubhajas filed a reply to this as follows: "The caste of the Urays is quite different from that of the Gubhajas. It is quite true that we are the priests of the Urays. But we have *never* taken food from the Urays nor was this mentioned in our original resolution. What we did say in our resolution was that no Gubhaju should perform religious worship in the house of Urays who had not taken *patia*. It is true that we take food from Urays in the Samek ceremony, but this major religious ceremony is like the Jagannath Bhojan (the famous rite at Puri in Orissa) of the Hindus in which caste restrictions are relaxed for the period of the ceremony. Subha Ratna was outcasted because he confessed to having taken cooked rice from Uray. The Court is requested to uphold his exclusion from our caste". The Gubhajas (say my informants) then tore off the upper part of their first resolution, the part containing reference to the fact that Gubhajas had previously taken food from their Uray *jajmans* but that conditions had now changed, and then submitted the remainder to the Court as part of the evidence.

The Magistrate decided the case with the following enigmatic sentence: "The taking of food from Urays is customary to those who take, and the outcasting is therefore reasonable". So he decided in favour of the ten Gubhaju defendants, but at the same time—and by a process of reasoning which I find quite inscrutable—he added a fine of ten rupees to be paid by these Gubhajas for saying that the Urays were inferior in caste to the Gubhajas.

In 1927 both parties appealed to the Bharadari or main appellate court. In this court a long involved argument ensued on the meaning of the sentence "The taking of food from Uray is customary to those who take". This court upheld the decisions of the lower court, and both parties took the dispute to the Niksari, the final court of appeal apart from the Maharaja himself. The chief judge in this court was Major General Prachandra Shamsheer Jang Bahadur Rana and he sat with three other leading Ranas and the Subha from the lower court to hear the case. But after hearing the argu-

ments these Niksari judges dismissed the case altogether saying that so long as the Uray themselves did not complain the court saw no reason to give any judgement on the status of the Urays vis-à-vis the Gubhajus.

Following this defeat, Subha Ratna and his co-belligerent Indrachudramani filed another case against the same ten Gubhajus alleging forgery in that they had torn off the part of the original resolution admitting that Gubhajus had previously taken food from the Urays. Here again they lost the case, the Magistrate arguing that it was unreasonable to believe that two hundred and eighty-three persons (the number of persons who had signed the resolution) would conspire in a fraud against two persons. Besides the plaintiffs could not submit to the court any evidence to prove that the Gubhajus had committed the forgery they alleged. So both Subha Ratna and Indrachudramani, the plaintiffs, were sentenced on a number of charges to be imprisoned for a total of ninety years and four months.

Not unnaturally both these men appealed to the next court against this somewhat harsh sentence of imprisonment. But this court upheld the sentence and added an additional two years imprisonment each. This was in 1929. In the following year the final court of appeal supported the decisions of the two lower courts and the two prisoners were given leave to submit a petition direct to Bhim Shamsheer, the new Maharaja who had taken over supreme control of Nepal following the death of Chandra Shamsheer. The Maharaja reviewed the case and in 1932 publicly announced his final decision as follows: "The Uray are inferior to the Gubhajus in caste, and those Gubhajus who have taken food with them are legally outcasted and are henceforth to be considered as Uray themselves". He confirmed the sentence of imprisonment (I understand that the two prisoners were in fact released a year or two later following an amnesty declared, as was the general practice, on the occasion of the birthday of the Maharaja then in power). This decision of the ruler is known in Nepal as the *Khadganishana* and is held to be final and irrevocable—so long as the Maharaja survives in office.

Up to this point the Urays themselves had taken no active part in the legal actions in the courts of the Rana political authorities. But following this decision of the Maharaja they were

roused to action. The Maharaja conveniently died soon after the *Khadganishana* thus making it possible for this decision to be openly challenged. A group of prominent and wealthy Uray immediately applied for and obtained permission from Juddha Shamsheer, the new Maharaja, to start an action in the courts against the Gubhajas on the question of caste status. So in 1934 began another series of legal disputes. The representatives of the Uray filed a petition claiming equality of status with the Gubhajas on the following grounds :

1. The priests of the Uray are the Gubhajas. For all domestic rites the priests come to Uray houses and take cooked rice after the rite has been completed. This has been the custom for centuries.
2. The Samek ceremony in which the cooking is done by the Uray is not the same as the Hindu Jagannath Bhojan which all castes can attend. For the Samek, only Gubhajas, Bares and Uray have the right and obligation to be present.
3. If the Samek ceremony is performed by a man of another caste (as for example when it was performed some seventy years ago in the time of Maharaja Jang Bahadur by Subha Dharma Narayan Manandhar—a Saymi) only parched rice and not cooked rice is customarily offered at the feasts. This shows the Uray to be equal to the Gubhajas and Bares.
4. The Gubhajas are trying to imitate the Brahmans. They want to be Buddhist Brahmans. So it is probable that they passed a resolution in the form stated by Subha Ratna.
5. When any Uray returns from Lhasa he has to undergo a Newar ritual called *nibvemke* so as to be permitted to re-enter his community (*sangh*). It is an essential part of this ritual that the Gubhaju priest who performs in the house of his Uray *jajman* should, when the rite is completed, sit together with the man who has returned and take cooked rice with him and the other members of the family.
6. In 1918 before all these disputes started, in a case before the courts on another matter altogether, a Gubhaju named Harucha stated as part of the evidence that he had taken food from his Uray *jajman*—the court records are available to prove that he said this. And yet Harucha has never been

outcasted for this by the Gubhaju association to which he belongs. This shows that Harucha was merely stating the normal Gubhaju custom.

7. And finally we Urays are Buddhist *gristhi* (laymen). The idea of high and low caste is totally opposite to the fundamental principles of Buddhism.

The ten Gubhaju defendants in their reply denied all the above arguments of the Urays. They insisted that the Samek ceremony was fully comparable with the Jagannath Bhojan of the Hindus. As for Harucha Gubhaju, they said that up to this moment they had been completely ignorant of his confession that he had taken food with his Uray *jajmans*. "As soon as the Uray revealed this fact" they added "we immediately excommunicated him from our caste in accordance with the *Khadganishana* of Maharaja Bhim Shamsheer".

The court settled the case in favour of the Urays, declaring the Uray and Gubhaju to be of equal status on the grounds that the Gubhajus admitted taking cooked rice from the Urays during the Samek ceremony.

The Gubhajus appealed to the next court who reversed the decision of the lower court, stating firstly that the Uray could not produce any written evidence in support of their claim to equal status; and secondly with regard to the Samek ceremony, the court pointed out that though the Uray claimed to have provided food for the Gubhajus, the Samek is a religious festival to which not only Gubhajus are invited but also His Majesty the King, His Highness the Maharaja, and many high officials of the Durbar. The Urays could not use the Samek ceremony to claim equality of status with these.¹² Hence they must lose the case.

The Urays, smarting under this defeat and frustrated in their failure to obtain a favourable decision on what they considered incontrovertible evidence, now resorted to a time-honoured sub-

¹² It must be observed that the court has clearly missed the point here. At the Samek ceremony a special pavilion is erected for the entertainment of the King, Maharaja, and the attendant nobles. Special foods (mainly confectionery and so forth) and drinks are provided. These special guests would not of course dream of accepting cooked rice nor would it be offered. The Gubhajus, Bares and Uray on the other hand sit together for a feast which includes cooked rice prepared by the Uray

terfuge. They bribed a whole series of government officials to introduce a forged and officially stamped document into some old records in the Government Records Office (the *Goswara Tahabail*) stating that the Gubhajus and Uray were equal in caste and could take cooked rice from each other. Then representatives of the Urays went openly to the Records Office, as is the practice, obtained on payment of one rupee a certified true copy of this document. Having thus prepared the way, they took the case to the final court of appeal in 1935. When the forged document was produced in evidence, the Gubhaju defendants immediately protested that it was a forgery. They were arrested and imprisoned for alleging that a Government document was a forgery. From prison they submitted a personal appeal to Juddha Shamsher begging him to intervene and order an investigation. The inquiries which Juddha Shamsher ordered led to the release from prison of the Gubhajus, the arrest of the eight Uray presenting the case, and the dismissal of a number of government officials. With somewhat unusual leniency considering the general administration of law under the Ranas, Juddha Shamsher released the prisoners after a month or so, and pronounced as his personal and final decision that the Uray were inferior in caste status to the Gubhaju.

This decision at the end of 1935 ended this particular legal action—but not of course the dispute at large. A whole series of further cases came to the courts, individual actions concerned mainly with internal disputes within the Gubhaju *guthis* and *sanghs*. They all appear to have been decided with reference to this pronouncement of *Khadganishana* of Maharaja Juddha Shamsher on the inferiority of the Uray. In 1937 for example the wife of one of the renegade Gubhajus siding with the Uray brought an action against the head of a Gubhaju association alleging that she had been insulted by being refused admission to a feast. In 1943 the sons of an expelled Gubhaju fought a case against their family priest because he would not perform their initiation rites. And there were many similar cases of this type and particularity over the priest/*jajman* relationship. The details of these cases are often of very considerable interest in the understanding of the internal structure of the main Newar Buddhist castes and of attitudes towards caste discrimination in general. The important point for the moment is that for a period of just under thirty years from

1926 onwards such cases were continually occurring in the Nepalese courts, all clearly related to the main problem of relative caste status which I have so far been describing. I wish now to turn from the courts to a consideration of effects of these disputes on the traditional patterns of relationships between the social groups involved.

From the beginning in 1926 Uray families had begun to boycott the main faction of Gubhajus: though *jajmans* of specific Gubhaju priests, they refused to call these priests for the performance of domestic rites (primarily initiation rites of boys and girls, marriages and the *sraddhas*—*pyam thaygu* in Newari—following deaths) if they knew that these priests would refuse to accept the customary—in Uray opinion—meal of cooked rice after the ceremonies were completed. It is important to understand that this boycott was never deliberately organised by the Urays: it was largely a matter of the gradual hardening of public opinion within the Uray community against what they considered to be the unwarranted pretensions of the majority of Gubhajus in the matter of caste status. At first it was the wealthiest families of Uray—particularly those with Tibetan trading connections—who, conscious of their own high social standing, bitterly resented being treated as inferior by their Gubhaju priests whose own economic status was, and still is, very low and in sharp contrast to that of many well-to-do Uray families whom they serve. As time went on, and particularly from about 1934 onwards when the antagonisms were sharply exacerbated by the head-on clash between the leading Gubhajus and a group of prominent Uray in the courts, more and more Uray families joined in the boycott until practically the whole Uray community was united in refusing to use their hereditary Gubhaju priests where these followed the majority Gubhaju opinion about not taking food from their Uray *jajmans*. Discussing this dispute with me a man of one of the wealthy Uray families among the first to join in this boycott told me (and this perhaps indicates the intensity of feelings involved) with much vehemence “When the *kaita puja* (the initiation rite for boys) for my son and nephew was to be performed, I called as usual the Guraju from the Gubhaju family of whom we have been the *jajmans* for as long as anyone remembers—probably centuries. After the ceremony was completed, I invited him to come and sit down to the feast with the family as has always

happened in the past. He refused. I was so angry that I kicked him down the stairs, and swore never to call him or any of his family again. Most Gubhajus are ignorant of anything to do with religion anyway. They know only how to read the right *mantras* and that's all. We have a Newari proverb which applies to them exactly—'the man who belches after eating a *dal* made of dried radish and turnip leaves but who pretends he is belching from a stomach full of *ghi*'.¹³

Instead of calling their hereditary family priest these Uray families took to using the small group of Gubhajus who sided with the Uray on this question of equality of status and who had thus been expelled from the traditional Gubhaju associations. This small group of dissident Gubhajus came to be known generally as "Uray Gubhajus" and as more and more Uray families took to calling them for priestly services the economic conditions of these Uray Gubhajus improved considerably. Though comparatively small in size (there are about twelve hundred Uray families in Kathmandu itself—by far the main centre of this community) the Uray caste is, as I have already observed, generally of high economic status—some Uray families being conspicuously rich, and certainly ranking among the wealthiest of all families in the Kathmandu Valley (while I was in Kathmandu in 1957, Gyan Sahu, a wealthy Uray of Nhaykan Tol gave a feast to which some seven thousand guests were invited and which he told me cost him over twenty thousand rupees). And since family priests thrive on wealthy *jajmans*, this increasingly effective boycott by the Urays was felt severely by the main faction of Gubhajus. Indeed from time to time through this economic pressure, the group of Uray Gubhajus was reinforced by defections from the main faction. To appreciate the full importance and consequences of this change from strict obligation to something approaching freedom of choice on the part at least of Uray *jajmans* in the calling of a priest for the performance of essential domestic rites it is necessary to consider in some detail the nature and organisation of the priest/*jajman* relationship as it prevailed before these internal struggles for status began.

¹³ In Newari, *Bhyata : kem naya ghya ; dhaka : tay mamha*. "*Bhyata Kem*", actually an extremely poor quality *dal* has great derogatory force—amounting to something like the English 'pig-swill'—in this saying, as in certain other contexts of abuse.

At the time the dispute began, all male Gubhajus in Kathmandu who had completed the initiation rite known in Newari as *acha-luigu* and in Sanskrit as *acharyabhises*—usually done at the age of eight or soon after—belonged automatically and as of right by virtue of their having completed this initiation rite to a single grand Gubhaju association known as the *acharya guthi*. This association met, and still meets, once annually on the day known in the Newar calendar as *du du cyam cyam* (this is the eighth day of the dark half of the Newar lunar month of Cilla—corresponding approximately to the month of Caitra in the solar calendar) in the buildings and courtyards behind the main stupa on the hill of Swayambhu. All Kathmandu Gubhajus are expected to attend (I use the present tense because the form of this organisation has not changed) and, including female relatives, the number present at the feasts and worship usually number several thousands. The proceedings last two days: the first at Swayambhu and the second in any *vihara* or private Gubhaju residence in the city to which the whole association is invited for a feast.

This main Gubhaju association is controlled by a council of eighteen leaders, each the *thakali* or oldest member of the eighteen subordinate associations (*sangh*) of which the *acharya guthi* is composed. These eighteen *sangha* are closely related to the performance of the ritual of initiation which makes a son of Gubhaju parents into a *vajracharya* and empowers him to perform religious rites on behalf of *jajmans*. Though there are altogether seventy-one former monastic compounds or *viharas* (or *baha* in Newari) in Kathmandu—some inhabited solely by Gubhaju families, some solely by Bare or gold and silversmith families, and some with mixed Gubhaju and Bare inhabitants—the initiation rites for Gubhaju can only be carried out in eighteen of these which are considered the main (and probably the oldest) *viharas* for this reason. Though any individual family can construct a *vihara* and perform the great ceremony known as *bahapuja* to have this new compound recognised by the Buddhist community as a whole as an authentic *vihara*, no initiation rites may be performed there. That is, though the total number of *viharas* in Kathmandu can, and of course on very rare occasions does, go on increasing the number of main *viharas* remains constant at eighteen. Thus wherever he may actually live, either in a *vihara*, a private residence somewhere

in the city, or even elsewhere in the Valley or out in East or West Nepal (and here I am referring only to those Gubhaju of Kathmandu origin), a Gubhaju father must always bring his son for initiation to that particular *vihara* within this group of eighteen in which he was initiated when a boy. This rite can be performed nowhere else. The performance of the rite qualifies the boy for admission automatically to the *sangh* of that *vihara*: there is no other method of recruitment to one of these eighteen *sangha* to which every Kathmandu Gubhaju must inevitably belong. The rite which makes him a Gubhaju at the same time makes him a member of a *sangh* and, through the *sangh*, a member of the *acharya guthi*.¹⁴

Until this series of disputes occurred, the *acharya guthi* ruled by the council of eighteen *thakalis* was the main organ of social control among Kathmandu Gubhaju. Its real strength lay in two facts: firstly *all* Gubhaju males above initiation belonged to this association and accepted the exercise of supreme authority by the council, with regard to the regulation of their behaviour as Gubhaju, as being in their best interests—that is, the power of the council

¹⁴ The *acharya guthi* of Kathmandu in 1957, at the time when I collected these figures, had a total membership of 1,164, the full male Gubhaju population above initiation. Its composition was as follows (the common Newari name of the *vihara* being given in brackets):

1. Mulsri Maha Bihar Sangh (Mu baha)	66	members
2. Maitripur Maha Bihar Sangh (Kwa baha)	110	..
3. Ratna Kantu Maha Bihar Sangh (Nhu baha)	76	..
4. Hemakarna Maha Bihar Sangh (Gan baha)	11	..
5. Henakar Maha Bihar Sangh (Dhoka baha)	50	..
6. Ratna Kirti Maha Bihar Sangh (Makhan baha)	130	..
7. Surat Sri Maha Bihar Sangh (Tachya baha)	63	..
8. Kanak Chaitya Maha Bihar Sangh (Jana baha)	47	..
9. Mantra Sidhi Maha Bihar Sangh (Sabula baha)	78	..
10. Raj Kirti Maha Bihar Sangh (Tej baha)	18	..
11. Brahma Chakra Maha Bihar Sangh (Om baha)	60	..
12. Bajra Sri Maha Bihar Sangh (Eku baha)	10	..
13. Kirtipunyabajra Dhatu Maha Bihar Sangh (Lagan baha)	200	..
14. Mani Sangh Maha Bihar Sangh (Mikha baha)	25	..
15. Sri Khanda Mula Maha Bihar Sangh (Shikam muga: baha)	200	..
16. Mani Sangh Maha Bihar Sangh (Musham baha)	25	..
17. Bhaskarmalla Parbatayebarta Maha Bihar Sangh (Itum baha)	25	..
18. Mani Sri Maha Bihar Sangh (Manshu baha)	80	..

rested on the solidarity of the Gubhajus as a corporate group ; and secondly, through its ability to control the performance of the initiation rite in the eighteen *viharas*, it could decide the essential question of recruitment to this community of priests. While it could not exercise any direct sanctions on the *jajmans*, the clients of the Gubhaju priests drawn from many different castes, compelling them to use particular priests it could through its command over the priests directly control the priest/*jajman* relationship.

Gubhaju priests are linked to particular families of *jajmans* through the inheritance by the Gubhajus of the rights to perform the domestic rituals for these particular client families (these rights are legally transferable to other Gubhajus in a manner to be explained presently). The *acharya guthi* was vitally concerned with the protection and enforcement of these rights. If a particular *jajman* family quarrelled with the particular Gubhaju priest possessing the hereditary right to perform their domestic rituals, they might wish to ask another Gubhaju to come. But if this Gubhaju thus infringed the rights of one of his colleagues, he would be expelled by the *acharya guthi* and by the subordinate *sangh* to which he belonged. (He would almost certainly be involved also in a case in courts brought by the Gubhaju family whose rights he had usurped). In addition, and this was the essential sanction, the *acharya guthi* through the particular *sangh* would prevent the sons of this Gubhaju performing their initiation rite and therefore being empowered to act as priests in the next generation. The sons would not then be Gubhajus at all, but would be counted as Bares (this is explained below). Expulsion from the *acharya guthi* therefore meant not only social humiliation for the man expelled and a sharp decline in the social standing of his family (the rights to act as priests, though of course exercised by individuals, resided collectively with the males of an undivided joint family) in relation to other Gubhaju families, but also in the extinction of a particular descent line of priests.

Under this traditional system of control, the *acharya guthi* did not itself actually decide cases of disputes among its members over these rights with regard to *jajmans*. When such disputes arose, the parties concerned were required to go for arbitration to a particular Gubhaju family in Raj Kirti Maha Bihar in Maru Tol in Kathmandu. The oldest male (that is, the *thakali*) of this family, held, and still

holds, the inherited office of Raj Gubhaju which, though not recognised under the Rana political authority, is without doubt a survival from the Malla regimes before 1768 when the Raj Gubhaju carried the authority of the Malla ruler to examine and pass judgement (which would then have the official support of the ruler) on cases concerned with rival claims between individual Gubhaju families to particular *jajmans*. Through the powers of the *acharya guthi* such cases were rarely if ever of the type described in the last paragraph—cases of one priest deliberately and without any justification infringing the rights of another, in other words cases of deliberate revolt against the whole system of control. The much more typical cases, and these appear to have been reasonably common, brought before the Raj Gubhaju were those arising out of complications of the rules of inheritance where both parties felt they had a true claim to the particular *jajmani* duties, and of course rewards, in question. If under the Mallas there was political support for the Raj Gubhaju's decisions, certainly since the Gurkha invasion the essential support for this method of arbitration has lain in the powers of the *acharya guthi*. Annually the Raj Gubhaju reported his decisions to the *acharya guthi*—where these decisions were not accepted amicably by both sides and the council endorsed them, with the implication of the exercise of sanctions if they were not obeyed.¹⁵

The *acharya guthi* functioned then as a powerful caste panchayat controlling on the one hand the specialised occupation and on the

¹⁵ The system works somewhat differently in Patan. The Gubhajus of Patan do not have one single *guthi* as in Kathmandu, though this is said to have been the case in the past. There are now, and have been for as long as anyone can remember, seven separate *acharya guthi* in Patan each with its own council of *thakalis*—varying in number between six and fifteen—concerned with the regulation of *jajmani* and with control of the performance of the initiation rite. A man is not permitted to leave one *acharya guthi* and join another. Disputes over *jajmans* between members of different *guthis* should be taken to the Raj Gubhaju (more commonly in Newari, Lay Guraju) family, which has no connection whatsoever with the Raj Gubhaju family in Kathmandu, for settlement. But, I was told, such cases in Patan almost invariably go to the courts for settlement—and the Raj Gubhaju is an office which exists in name only. The system in Bhatgaon, the other main Newar centre, is similar to Kathmandu in having one *acharya guthi* but here the office of Raj Gubhaju though known to have existed once is said to be no longer in existence.

other the recruitment of its members. And paradoxically it was the very effectiveness of its powers which in the outcome appeared at least partially responsible for its undoing. Indeed an examination of the strengths and weaknesses of this Gubhaju *acharya guthi* provides one with an instructive case study in the politics of trade union organisations. Because this of course is precisely what it was—a trade union of priests which had succeeded in establishing and maintaining a 'closed shop'. The rank and file accepted the system because it protected their rights, and therefore their economic interests. If their employers, here their *jajmans* could hire and fire with absolute freedom, no individual Gubhaju would know where he stood from one week to the next. And so individually they supported and obeyed the union which by safeguarding their rights gave them economic security. And any individual who challenged the system knew that he would be expelled by the union, would be dependent entirely on the goodwill and whims of his *jajmans* who might well be influenced against him by the hostility of the Gubhaju community at large, and would certainly sacrifice the livelihood of his sons in the next generation.

Because such challenges had never occurred, the leaders¹⁶ of the Gubhaju union clearly came to think that they had more power over the rank and file than they actually possessed. The closed shop had existed for so long that they seem to have believed that the obvious unity obtained firstly because the council had at its disposal effective sanctions to deal with recalcitrance, and secondly because of a strong affective content in the loyalties of individual Gubhajus to their *sangh* and to the *acharya guthi*. While these two factors were undoubtedly involved, there was a third major reason for the effectiveness of the *acharya guthi* as a trade union organisation. This was the fact that the solidarity of the rank and file

¹⁶ It must be observed here that the 'leaders' who took the initiative in framing the resolution about not taking food from Uray which began this struggle, and 'the ten prominent Gubhajus' who were sued in court, were not actually *thakalis* or members of the council of the *acharya guthi*. This is actually less of a problem than it might appear at first sight. The *thakalis* from the eighteen *sangh* hold their offices by virtue of being the eldest males; actual power is exercised through them by de facto leaders, usually vigorous, reasonably well-off men of late middle age. They lead and influence opinion and initiate action with the approval and endorsement of the council of aged, and in some cases senile, *thakalis*.

behind the leadership rested on a fundamental community of economic interest. In their actions at the beginning of 1926, the Gubhaju leaders appear to have ignored this fact. These leaders seem to have felt (I see no other way of understanding the framing of the original resolution) that the combination of powers of control on the one hand and the solidarity of Kathmandu Gubhajus as a whole on the other was sufficient to enable them to command unanimous support in a course of action designed to raise the status of the caste as a single group. And if this unanimity had in fact been achieved they might well have succeeded. But because they ignored the essential fact that their actions directly conflicted with the economic interests of part of their membership (notably those who could not afford to upset their wealthy Uray *jajmans*) and undermined the solidarity on which unity rested, they made a major mistake of judgement. A dissident faction was formed, small in size at first but one which grew to greater significance as the economic pressure from the Urays made itself felt. And no matter how the leaders called into play the ultimate sanctions of excommunication—and these in practice proved less powerful than had been imagined—they could not subdue the Uray Gubhajus who, though they framed their dissent in terms of lofty Buddhist principles, had their backs to the wall of harsh economic reality.

Even so the closed shop principle could not have been challenged successfully were it not that these Uray Gubhajus received the support of their Uray *jajmans*. Part of the reasons for this support is of course obvious. The wealthy Uray families refused to admit themselves inferior in social standing to poor Gubhaju priests. But in part the support—and this is one of the reasons the Bares were drawn into the struggle on the side of the Urays and the Uray Gubhajus—was due to the sharp dislike on the part of the *jajmans* for the manner in which the Gubhaju had come to treat the priest/*jajman* relationship. And this again arose out of the apparent strength of the *acharya guthi*.

While the *acharya guthi* was functioning properly, the *jajman* families using Gubhaju priests to perform their essential domestic rituals had no say whatsoever in the choice of priests. This was entirely a matter of inheritance—the descendants of a *jajman* family were required to call the descendants of the Gubhaju family which had performed the rites for their forefathers in the earlier

generations. No matter how much they might dislike their particular priest or how low their opinion of his abilities in the discharge of his priestly functions, no other Gubhaju could come on pain of excommunication by the *acharya guthi*. For the *jajmans* the relationship had become compulsory. This fact seems to have set in motion a train of tensions and stresses in this important social relationship, due largely but not entirely to some high-handed behaviour on the side of the priests who, secure in their closed shop, appear to have treated their *jajmans* with scant concern for their feelings. It became a common practice for example for the priests to buy and sell these *jajmani* rights. Gubhajus would buy clients from other Gubhajus in possession of the rights to priestly services for these clients, a poor family of clients fetching, or so I am told, somewhere between five and twenty-five rupees, and a wealthy *jajman* family between two hundred and three hundred rupees. This buying and selling was recognised by the *acharya guthi*, but from the many comments I heard from client families about this practice, the *jajmans* themselves resented it deeply and considered it a gross abuse of this relationship. But while the Gubhajus were so tightly organised, they could do nothing about it. Further the priests used their complete control of this relationship, to extort higher fees and better gifts from these client families, particularly the wealthier families. This was more a subtle extortion than outright blackmail (as one Uray family described it to me). It rested on the knowledge on the part of the *jajman* that should he quarrel with his priest, this priest could sell him off (it is of course the rights that were sold, but this is how my informants would put it) to a Gubhaju ten miles away in Sankhu or to a Gubhaju away in Bhatgaon. The priest could do this, and in some publicised instances did do this, deliberately to cause the client family the trouble and inconvenience of having to send a long way each time it wished to call a priest. *Jajmani* rights could also be left as bequests in Gubhaju wills without the client family concerned having any say in the matter.

This abuse of this relationship clearly arose out of the very strength of the Gubhaju trade union giving the priests unilateral control of what was essentially a bilateral social relation. It did not endear the Gubhajus to their *jajmans*, and when the rift appeared was an added reason for the Urays to support the dissident

section of Gubhajas with enthusiasm. For the first time they were being offered a freedom of choice and an escape from what they considered a subtle system of extortion. And it was its inability to exert effective sanctions on the families of *jajmans* which proved the real weakness of the *acharya guthi*.

For an important reason, this high-handedness on the part of the priests affected the Uray and Bares to a much greater extent than families from the other castes in the Valley who used Gubhaju priests. For these latter families, the Gubhajas had to remember a vital fact in the ordering of their relationship with their *jajmans*—and that was that although the Gubhajas might have tied up the priest side of this relationship completely, they were not the only priests in the Valley capable of performing domestic rites. There were always the Brahmans. If a particular family of these other castes became thoroughly exasperated at the behaviour of its Gubhaju, it could always give up using Gubhajas altogether and turn over to using Brahmans. And the wealthier the *jajman* the more likely he would be to do this, as I have described earlier in this essay. In dealing with *jajmans* from castes other than Uray or Bare, the Gubhaju had to reckon with his Brahman competitor, and this itself was a very effective restraint on high-handedness. But no such restraint was present in the case of the Uray and Bare. Of all the castes in the Valley, apart from the Gubhajas themselves, these two are the most exclusively 'orthodox' Buddhists, and for a family from one of these castes to use a Brahman would be unthinkable. I certainly found not a single case of such a family using a Brahman priest for the performance of any domestic rituals. And this seems one of the main reasons the Gubhajas initially felt themselves in a strong enough position to challenge the Uray directly in the resolution about the taking of food, and a reason further why the dispute was limited to this particular group of main Buddhist castes in Kathmandu, other castes not being directly involved.

But as the dispute progressed between the Gubhaju main faction and the Urays, the third section of this particular group of castes—the Bares—were most certainly involved and came to have an important effect on the course of events. The Bares by traditional occupation are gold and silversmiths. At first aloof, they were gradually drawn in on the side of the Urays for three reasons :

(1) as wealthy merchants—many Uray families are among the most important customers of these workers in precious metals—and these Uray families appear to have successfully exerted economic pressure on the Bares to throw in their lot with the Uray against the Gubhajus; (2) the Bares as well as the Urays deeply resented what they considered Gubhaju malpractices with regard to the priest/*jajman* described above, and were on this score already aligned against the Gubhajus; and (3) the Bares, particularly in Kathmandu, were already involved in a private dispute with the Gubhajus over the question of relative status.

The relationship between the Gubhajus and the Bares is most complex, and I have no doubt that it would be technically correct to describe the Gubhajus and Bares as two sections of the same caste rather than as two separate castes. Certainly this is a true appreciation of the relationship for all other communities in the Valley other than Kathmandu itself. In Sankhu, Patan or Bhatgaon for example, Gubhajus and Bares intermarry freely, the sons following the occupation of the father—if a Gubhaju father, then the sons would take the *acha luigu* initiation rite and become priests: if a Bare father, the sons would follow the traditional occupation and become workers in gold and silver. In these cases, there is absolutely no distinction, other than this occupational specialisation, between the two sections and they both refer to one another as belonging to one caste (*chagu jat*). Alone of all the Newar castes, Gubhajus and Bares together are the inhabitants of the *viharas* or erstwhile monastic compounds which exist in considerable numbers in every Newar community wherever these two sections occur, and which form an essential element in the religious life of Newar Buddhists. Some of these *viharas* are inhabited by Gubhajus alone, some by Bares alone, and many by both sections together. The Sanskrit term *bandya*—or more commonly its Newari derivative, Bare (or Bamra in the Bhatgaon dialect)—is applied in common speech to describe the two sections collectively. Both Gubhaju and Bare boys, at about the age of eight or nine, undergo the same basic initiation rite known as *cuda karma* in Sanskrit and as *bare cuigu* in Newari. On the fourth day of this rite (though it may be, and in Kathmandu more often is, done separately some time later), Gubhaju boys alone go on to take the special rite qualifying them to be *vajracharya* that is, the rite known as

acharya abhises or *acha luigu* to which I have frequently referred. Bare boys, not being permitted to undergo this latter induction into the role of *vajracharya*, cannot therefore become Gubhajas and serve as priests: Gubhajas—above initiation that is; this term only has meaning with this essential reference—cannot by common consent follow the reserved occupation of the Bares and become gold and silversmiths. But both these statements need qualifications. To deal with the latter statement first, and this is only a minor qualification, in Bhatgaon many Gubhajas in fact do the work of gold and silversmiths though, taking the Valley as whole, this appears an exception rather than a common practice.

The qualifications to the first statement are much more complex and lie at the root of the long continuing dispute over status between the Gubhajas and Bares of Kathmandu. The key to the problem lies in the fact that though Bare and Gubhaju boys take the same basic initiation ceremony (*bare cuigu*) only the son of a Gubhaju father may take the final part of this ceremony, the *acha luigu*. If this is not actually done on the fourth day, it *must* be done before marriage. If it is not done before marriage, the son of a Gubhaju father remains a Bare and cannot be counted as a Gubhaju at all.¹⁷ Clearly in order to restrict the intake of priests, and it is factors of demography which underlie most of the present Gubhaju troubles, the *acha luigu* rite was formerly much more elaborate and costly to perform than it is today. Many poor Gubhajas, or so I was told, could not afford to perform it for their sons, who consequently remained Bares. But once a Bare, it was next to impossible to become a Gubhaju in the next generation. Certainly quite impossible after marriage.¹⁸ Thus, say my Bare informants, all Bares

¹⁷ As an illustration of the notions surrounding these initiation rites, I should add here that I was frequently told that a Bare or Gubhaju boy failing to perform the basic *bare cuigu* would for this reason become an Uray. I actually found not a single instance of this happening. I do not propose here to describe the form of these initiation rites. I intend on some later occasion presenting a detailed study of Newar initiation rites, both for males and females, including a comparison of those performed by a Gubhaju priest with those performed by a Brahman.

¹⁸ However there is one recorded instance of this actually happening. In Brian Hodgson's time (that is, about 1840) the Newar pandit he worked with, Amritananda Sakyabhiksu (a Bare, and certainly married) was elevated to the rank of Bajracarya (Gubhaju) on account of his scholarship by order of the King of Nepal.

were once Gubhajus. And whether this statement be in fact true or false, it is in my experience certainly not denied by Gubhajus themselves: indeed agreement on this point is one of the main reasons for the complete absence of any restrictions on social intercourse between the two sections in every other Newar community except Kathmandu itself.

In Kathmandu, the basic initiation rite for Bare as well as Gubhaju boys must be carried out in one of the main eighteen *viharas* to which I have earlier referred, the priests performing the rite being of course in either case Gubhajus.¹⁹

Formerly in Kathmandu intermarriage between Bares and Gubhajus was as free and unrestricted as it is today in other parts of the Kathmandu Valley. But from about forty or fifty years ago (and there is incontestable evidence from genealogies to confirm this) Gubhaju families began to avoid the arrangement of marriage with Bare families, and today in Kathmandu, though they still occur, such marriages are rare. The gradual widening of this breach between the two sections in Kathmandu was of course directly related to the growing Gubhaju concern with questions of status and their determination to assert their superiority—a process which had clearly been going on for some time in the relations between Gubhajus and Bares and which, in 1926, suddenly bubbled to the surface and erupted in a course of events which got out of anyone's control. The Bares were clearly offended by this withdrawal of marriage relations on the part of the Gubhajus with its direct

¹⁹ There is an exception to this statement that must be noted. In addition to the 71 *baha* in Kathmandu with in many cases mixed Gubhaju and Bare occupants, there are 16 *bahi* (linguistically a diminutive form) inhabited by Bare alone. The Bare boys who are permitted to perform their *bare cuigu* in one of the 16 *bahi* are referred to as "Bhikubare". Apparently a very long time ago some dispute occurred among Bares leading to a small faction breaking away and founding these *bahi* in which they were permitted to hold their initiation rites separately.

A further distinct class among Bares are known as "Budhacarje" and consists of only 18 families. These families live up at Swayambhu, and take it in turns to act as wardens of the shrines there and worshippers. They perform their initiation rites in the *baha* at Swayambhu. They are not priests in any way.

These two classes of Bares intermarry quite freely with one another and with all other Bares and Gubhajus. No other distinctions exist apart from those outlined above.

implication that the Bares were of lower status, and those Bares with a fairly recent tradition of being descended from Gubhaju fathers whose poverty had prevented them from performing the *vajracharya* initiation rite for their sons, fought back by demanding that their sons be allowed to undergo the *acha luigu* rite and so become Gubhajus. This demand was of course not accepted by the *acharya guthi* who announced that any Gubhaju priest who performed this rite for Bare boys would be immediately outcasted. And prior to 1926 while the *acharya guthi* was accepted by all Gubhajus as the supreme authority, none did. (But as we shall see this problem was by no means finally disposed of). A number of court cases were fought by Gubhajus and Bares over this question, all of which the Gubhajus won, the courts upholding the right of the *acharya guthi* to restrict the performance of the initiation to the sons of Gubhaju fathers in accordance with ancient custom.

Armed with this knowledge of the background, we can now turn back to the closing stages of the main series of disputes with which I am primarily concerned. Though they were themselves clearly exasperated by the behaviour of the Gubhajus, the Bares at first either kept out of the business altogether or tended to support the main Gubhaju faction whom they probably thought to be the strongest of the groups involved and therefore most likely to win. The Bares may well have thought that by siding with, or at least not opposing openly, the main body of Gubhajus in this dispute they might thus succeed in inducing the Gubhajus to settle in their favour their own dispute with the Gubhajus over relative status which had been continuing for some time. The Bares, that is, were not anxious to commit themselves irrevocably to one side or another until they could have some idea how things were going to turn out. And the Gubhaju successes in the major court cases no doubt curbed any enthusiasm Bares may have felt for joining in the struggle against the Gubhajus for whom, after their own experiences over the abuses of the priest/*jajman* relationship and over the question of their personal social standing, the Bares can have had little sympathy. And clearly, as events showed, the Bares as a whole were by no means unanimous in deciding what in the circumstances would be the course of action most likely to coincide with their own best interests. Most Bare families, feeling on the one hand the economic pressure being exerted by wealthy

Uray families and seeing on the other the growing defections of Gubhajas from the main faction to the group of Uray Gubhajas and the associated collapse of the powers of the *acharya guthi* as an effective organ of control, came to support the Uray and the group of dissident Gubhajas.

But apart from verbal support, these Bare families did very little until in 1950 an event of major significance occurred. 1950 is a most important date in recent Nepalese political history: it is the year which saw the collapse of Rana rule and the end of a century of despotism under the Rana dynasties. More immediately relevant to the subject here being discussed, 1950 was also the year in which a private individual, an extremely wealthy Uray named Samek Ratna of Nhaykan Tol in Kathmandu, decided to pay the expenses—amounting in this case I am told to some eighty thousand rupees—for the performance of a Samek ceremony. All the Urays in Kathmandu immediately impressed upon him the necessity of using only Uray Gubhajas for the religious worship which is an essential part of this ceremony. He agreed, though it involved a departure from ancient custom since this worship should be done by priests holding official positions in the *acharya guthi*. The main faction of Gubhajas were infuriated by this decision. They called a special meeting of all Gubhajas (apart from those expelled to date by the *acharya guthi*) and a resolution was passed forbidding all Gubhajas and Bares to attend this Samek ceremony on pain of excommunication.

However in 1951 when the ceremony was actually held, the majority of Kathmandu Bares ignored the Gubhaju threats and attended the ceremony along with Gubhajas and Bares from all over the Valley (who have the right to attend the Samek). The only people absent of those who should attend were the main body of Kathmandu Gubhajas. These latter were now even more furious. They were also in a quandary. The Bares of Kathmandu number about seven hundred families all using Gubhajas as their priests. It was clearly difficult to take any strong action against this whole group which would not boomerang on those Gubhaju priests of the main faction still being used by these Bare families, and thus lead to a further split in the solidarity of the Gubhajas still remaining loyal to the *acharya guthi*. After bitter experience the Gubhaju leaders were now becoming wiser. But equally they could not ignore

this direct challenge to their authority. And thus they compromised by excommunicating, after a heated discussion, just eighteen Bare families said to have been prominent in the Bare opposition to the Gubhajus (but one informant discussing this action with me said that, on the contrary, these families were chosen deliberately because they were relatively unimportant). They further forbade in the agreed resolution any Gubhaju priest to perform any religious worship of any kind in the house of a Bare so long as the latter did not provide a statement in writing to the priest that he had either not attended the Samek or was prepared to perform a ceremony of atonement if he had done. Up to this point Bare families were continuing to use their hereditary Gubhaju priests according to traditional custom. By this relatively mild decision the Gubhajus sought to assert their authority without entirely alienating this important section of their *jajmans*. And they well understood of course that the Bares as a whole were not united among themselves in their attitudes, some Bare families being convinced that they had more to gain by throwing in their lot with the Gubhaju *acharya guthi*. But here again the Gubhaju leaders appear to have misjudged the intensity of feeling on the part of the majority of Bares.

Shortly afterwards a death occurred in a Bare family at Itum Baha, and as is the custom the son of the deceased called his Gubhaju priest to come for the immediate funerary rites. The priest said he would not come unless the man concerned gave him a written statement in accordance with the terms of the Gubhaju resolution. The man refused, and the Gubhaju stayed away. But something had to be done at once about the corpse. A Bare man at Itum Baha said that he knew how to perform the necessary rituals, and he did so to the satisfaction of the relatives of the deceased man. After this, all the other Bares at Itum Baha resolved to use only this particular Bare man as a priest for the performance of their domestic rites, and not to call Gubhajus at all. And a little later, these Bares took the lead in calling a mass meeting of Kathmandu Bares at which a new association was formed called the Sakya Samaj with the purpose of organising a Bare boycott of the Gubhajus (apart from the Uray Gubhajus). All Bares who did not join this new association were to be outcasted. The vast majority of Bares joined and accepted the rules, but a small but still sizeable group of Bares centred on Om Baha refused and organised a rival associa-

tion called the Dharma Niyem Pal Sangh ("the society for the defence of the rules of religion") siding with the Gubhajus. And thus the Bares were split in two.

Now things got steadily worse. The *acharya guthi* was increasingly ignored by its rank and file members, and the system of arbitration in cases of *jajmani* disputes by the Raj Gubhaju collapsed altogether. The *acharya guthi* finding its powers of expulsion quite ineffective in dealing with recalcitrance on a large scale at least still had control of the eighteen main *viharas* and therefore the powers to prevent the sons of expelled Gubhajus from performing their initiation rites. And this was becoming a serious problem for the Uray Gubhajus. The rite should be done at about nine and certainly before marriage. But in some cases their sons were reaching their twenties and still had not been initiated. Marriages were being delayed but this situation could obviously not go on indefinitely.

In 1952, a Bare father asked one of the Gubhajus who supported the *acharya guthi* and who was not his family priest if he would perform the *bare cuigu* for his sons without first imposing any conditions about written statements and so forth. The Bare belonged to the Sakya Samaj. The Gubhaju agreed and twenty-five of his fellow Gubhajus all members still of the *acharya guthi*, and all obviously fed up with the whole business, agreed to help him. These were all men of good social position and hitherto staunch supporters of the *acharya guthi*, but for this act they were all expelled, a move which further eroded the popularity of the Gubhaju leaders.

Later the same year, one of the Uray Gubhajus applied to the current Prime Minister, M. P. Koirala, for permission for his son to undergo initiation in one of the eighteen *viharas*. And presumably because Democracy had arrived in Nepal and a new climate of ideas was abroad in the land, the Prime Minister declared the *viharas* to belong to all men in general and gave the necessary permission. The rival factions turned out in force when this initiation rite was being performed and armed police had to intervene to quell disorders and allow the ceremony to be completed.

Events had taken such a serious turn that prominent men of all the factions involved realised that the continuation of the quarrel would do more harm than good to any side. Meetings were arranged

and compromises sought, but all without success. The only point at issue now was the priest/*jajman* relationship—the Gubhajus wanting to return to the traditional system in its entirety: the Uray Gubhajus, the Urays, and the main Bare group wishing to abolish the practices of buying and selling *jajmani* rights and to give the *jajman* freedom of choice in calling the priest he wanted. Neither side would yield to the other. And all the efforts to reach agreement ended in deadlock on this point.

In 1954 a fresh eruption occurred. According to the twelve year cycle, this was the year for the regular Samek ceremony to be held. The vast majority of the members of the *guthi* which by subscriptions pays the expenses of this regular Samek were Bares and Urays. And of these the majority agreed that the priests that should be used at the Samek should be Uray Gubhajus only. The Gubhajus and the Bares who sided with them opposed this vehemently. So on the appointed day for the Samek, all the Gubhajus, Bares and Urays of Kathmandu—a crowd of thousands—assembled at Hanuman Dhoka when the gods from the *vihara* shrines arrived on the shoulders of their respective devotees to be carried in procession to the meadows at the foot of the hill of Swayambhu on the west of the city, the traditional site for the Samek. The Bares and Urays tried to carry off the gods to Swayambhu: the Gubhajus tried to prevent them. Fighting and scuffling broke out on a large scale and the police had to intervene. Large numbers were arrested from all factions involved. High officials from the Government arrived on the scene to try to persuade the leaders of the various parties to settle their differences and permit the peaceful performance of the Samek but without success.

These scenes of disorder brought the quarrel to a climax. Lok Darshan, the young Private Secretary to the Crown Prince and himself a Gubhaju, was ordered by the Crown Prince (now the present King of Nepal, and at this time the ruler in his father's absence) to call a meeting at once of all the leaders of the factions to reach a settlement without fail. The meeting assembled and though there was a long and heated argument, the leaders realised only too clearly that matters had got out of control and that a settlement had to be achieved at this meeting. They eventually agreed on a form of words, and a document was drawn up and signed by the sixty-three leaders present representing all the parties

involved. The document stated that all sides agreed on the following three conditions to end the dispute :

1. The Uray Gubhajus who had been expelled from the *acharya guthi* and from various *guthis* and *sanghs* should be taken back at once and without conditions.
2. The Samek ceremony should be celebrated according to ancient rites and customs.
3. All Gubhajus should take back their respective *jajmans* according to the rules of the *acharya guthi*.

It will be noted that there is no mention whatsoever in this document of the status of the Urays vis-à-vis the Gubhajus or of whether it was permissible for Gubhaju priests to take food from their Uray *jajmans* without fear of expulsion by their caste fellows. It will be remembered that for the first ten years or so of the dispute this was the main issue, the issue which led to a series of major court cases. But the fact is that as time went on the real problem became that of the priest/*jajman* relationship and though the 'compromise' above contained a reference to this subject, everyone in fact knew that this was merely a form of words to put a formal and public end to a long and tiresome internecine quarrel which was wrecking havoc within this group of the main Buddhist castes of the Newars.

The effects of this struggle could be clearly seen during the period of my studies in the Valley in 1956 and early 1957. Persons of all the factions taking part told me repeatedly that the whole business had been completely finished and settled at this meeting in 1954, and, resorting unconsciously to a device with which every anthropologist must be well familiar, were by this time arguing vehemently that the real cause of the whole trouble lay in a carefully hatched plot by Chandra Shamsher and the Ranas generally to destroy the Newar Buddhist castes finally and completely. "It was all the fault of the Ranas, particularly Chandra Shamsher. Didn't he banish the Newar monks? Didn't he order the Newars to take *patia*? He knew of course that of all the Newars the strongest were the Gubhajus and Bares and Urays, and so he plotted with his Brahman Raj Guru to set us against one another. And we were fools not to realise this".

But in spite of these signs of a return to harmony within this

group of castes, the whole situation was clearly in a state of flux. The leaders of the *acharya guthi* had managed to save face by securing a wording of the document of compromise that fully satisfied them, and certainly did not appear at all anxious to reopen a dispute in which they had so obviously been on the losing side. But though the wording of the document was quite precise, nobody quite knew what exactly the current situation was. Certainly the Uray Gubhajus had been taken back into the *acharya guthi* and were present as I observed at the *acharya guthi* annual meeting at Swayambhu in March 1957. But from the side of the *jajmans*, the client families clearly appeared to think that as a result of the settlement they now had full freedom to call any Gubhaju they wished as their family priest without this priest suffering from the *acharya guthi*. And also that the former practice of buying and selling *jajmani* rights among Gubhajus had been completely abolished: and this appears to be correct for the simple reason that since a Gubhaju could no longer be sure whether his client families were going to respect his hereditary rights or not he would be unlikely to find another Gubhaju willing to buy rights of such doubtful value.

On the other hand many client families I spoke to, told me that they were still not permitted to call any other Gubhaju but their hereditary family priest. Equal doubts were apparent among Gubhajus themselves, some thinking that, except for the annual feasts, the *acharya guthi* no longer had any powers of control over the priest/*jajman* relationship and that a priest could not go to any *jajman* family if called, others insisting that the traditional system still operated as strongly as ever. And while I was in the Valley, a Gubhaju priest performed the *acha luigu* rite for the sons of Bares of Jan Baha—Bares who had many times before demanded this rite for their sons but who had been stoutly refused this by the *acharya guthi*. Formerly such an act would have been unheard of, and would most certainly have led to the immediate outcasting of the Gubhaju concerned by the *acharya guthi*. The *acharya guthi* had certainly not accepted these sons of Bares as members of the Gubhaju association, but it had equally not expelled the Gubhaju concerned. Having completed the *acha luigu*, are these sons of Bares now Gubhajus? Nobody quite knows, though there are strong opinions for and against among both Bares and Gubhajus.

And on this point which fully indicates the present measure of confusion and uncertainty which is one of the consequences of this long struggle which to a marked extent wrecked the traditional system of control exerted through a once-powerful trade union of priests, I now leave this story of turmoil in the main Buddhist castes to consider the wider issues it raises in relation to an understanding of social processes operating within the Newar caste system as a whole.

CONCLUSION

The questions raised by this series of disputes may be phrased as follows : why did this internal struggle occur at all ? why did it occur at this particular period ? what prompted the Gubhajus on a course of action which was clearly a determined and somewhat desperate attempt to establish their superiority in caste status ? why indeed should the Gubhajus be so obviously concerned about their prestige and authority—and what were the “changing conditions” to which they referred in their original resolution of 1926 ? why in brief (and recalling the accusation of the Urays) should the Gubhajus wish to imitate the Brahmins ?

Readers who have followed my earlier brief account of the general social situation of the Newars, the comparatively recent rise of the Ranas to supreme political dominance and their validation of this dominance in the cultural ideology of Brahmanical Hinduism through patronage of the Brahman and the Hindu “Establishment” and increasing discrimination against the Buddhist Newar, and also my description of the extensive process of individual upward mobility in “caste” terms with its rejection of the Gubhaju in favour of the status-giving Brahman, should have no great difficulty in providing the answers to these questions. It is not surprising in the circumstances that the Gubhajus should wish to imitate the Brahmins. Equally their errors of judgement should be understandable and familiar to students of caste since the whole anthropological literature on caste is pervaded by similar errors of interpretation of the function of ritual in Indian caste systems. The wording of the original Gubhaju resolution is significant : “We have been taking food from Urays but conditions have now changed. *To maintain the Gubhajus’ prestige and authority over*

society, we should not take food from Urays." But ritual purity by itself does not give political power. It merely expresses in a traditional idiom, "prestige and authority" based essentially on the harsh realities of the differential distribution of political and economic power within the system. As this distribution of power changes, so eventually—allowing for "cultural lag"—will modifications occur in the associated symbolic representations of precedence expressed in ritual behaviour. But modifications of ritual behaviour, unsupported by appropriate political and economic power, will prove either impossible or without effect on existing status differentials. Were this not essentially so in caste systems, it is difficult to understand why the process of cultural imitation known as "Sanskritisation" has not been universal throughout all Indian castes even untouchables—and indeed why it has not been fully completed, if one can speak of complete "Sanskritisation", centuries ago.

If we are to follow Leach in his recent discussion of caste, it seems we are required to interpret the Gubhajas' behaviour described at length above as a negation of, rather than an attempt to assert, caste principles. In Leach's view, "If a whole caste group plays the role of a political faction by competing with other such factions for some common political and economic goal it thereby acts in defiance of caste tradition My own view is that wherever castes are seen to be acting as corporations against like groups of *different caste*, then they are acting in defiance of caste principles Caste ideology presupposes that the separation between different named castes is absolute and intrinsic. People of different caste are, as it were, of different species—as cat and dog. There can therefore be no possibility that they should compete for merit of the same sort. But with members of different grades of the same caste, the exact opposite is the case; the grades would not exist unless their members were constantly in competition one against the other. In this respect, grades within a single caste have the nature of social classes rather than castes".²⁰ This, in my view, is a thoroughly unrealistic and inaccurate picture of caste systems as they are actually encountered in practice—an excellent example of the confusion that arises from the failure to distinguish between the essentially static paradigm of caste stereotypes, expressed in verbal statements (about "traditional" occupations and concerning

²⁰ Leach, E. R.—1960, pp. 6 & 7.

the ideal interaction of ritual peers), and the dynamics of power distribution within actual systems. What indeed is "merit of the same sort"? Status, wealth, political power and office ("Honour, Riches and Authority" in Hobbes' celebrated dictum about the "natural predicament of mankind") are universal goals common to all castes and the competition for them between and within castes is fierce and continuous—"like cats and dogs" to continue Leach's simile—if *the conditions, so far as sanctions and control are concerned, permit*. No caste is an island unto itself. In caste systems, success or failure in this competition tends to be translated into a particular and accepted status language, that of ritual, before it is publicly accepted and confirmed.

All systems of extreme social stratification in which there is an institutionalised and explicit ascription of rank by birth tend to exhibit the same structural form and to incorporate the same processes of social interaction. They tend equally to involve a distinctive ideology which rationalises the inequalities of the system and upholds the interests of the politically superior ranks or classes. This ideology is an idiosyncratic cultural phenomenon: it may well be the doctrines of ritual purity and impurity (and so we by convention use the term "caste") or equally the theories of racial supremacy or the divine right of kings, or whatever. Obviously we need in examining such systems to describe this ideology carefully and fully and to observe its use as a mechanism of reinforcement. But we must not be misled into arguing, in the face of ample evidence to the contrary, that this ideology is the vital characteristic of the system of stratification under examination, the only or even the main reason for its existence. In Indian studies such a position leads all too easily to vague, intuitive, mystical interpretations of Indian caste behaviour in terms of assumptions about a cultural and essentially psychological unity in Indian attitudes and character. Such interpretations are the negation of the rules of the sociological method. The so-called unity of India, so far as this is a sociological fact, resides as much in the common history of political and economic conditions as it does in the "ubiquity of the Brahmans and their common possession of a sacred literature and a body of religious laws".²¹ Basham, distinguished historian and Sanskrit scholar, has recently expressed a view which is relevant to this

²¹ Gough, E. Kathleen—1960, p. 11.

point : "There is a widespread view that Hindu culture has always had a uniquely spiritual and other-worldly character. This generalisation is still sedulously propagated by some Indians, and is often to be found in European writings on India, especially those written before the transfer of power. To my mind it is no more true of India than of medieval Europe and many other earlier cultures."²²

In this essay at least I have presented Newar "caste" as essentially a function of the political and economic conditions in the Kathmandu Valley "whether present or belonging to the recent past", in the phrase of Ibbetson. I have found it necessary, in order to describe the processes at work in the Newar caste system accurately and intelligibly, to refer constantly to these basic political and economic factors—the rise of the Rana despotism, the incidence of economic change and increased occupational diversification, the status inconsistencies of wealthy and influential Jyapus or of increasingly impoverished Gubhaju priests, the need for material support for the process of upward "caste" mobility because of the economic checks of a more expensive style of living (use of costly Brahmans, the purchase of entry into Shrestha associations and of Shrestha brides), the economics of the priest/*jajman* relationship and the sanctions on this relationship for the Newar Buddhists, the use of physical force by the Ranas and their courts and the regulation of caste disputes by these courts, the absence of sanctions available to the Shresthas to prevent recruitment through upward mobility, the explicit Gubhaju goal of prestige and authority, and so forth. Without a full recognition of the basic significance of these factors, Newar caste behaviour is unintelligible.

There is one final point that needs to be made—apart from observing that I have necessarily confined my attention in this essay to certain sections only of the Newar caste system: an examination of the social situation of other Newar castes, notably the position of wealthy but low ritual status Saymis or that of the castes within the separate hierarchy of the subordinate *ma ju pim* block, must await another occasion when I shall seek to show that precisely the same mechanisms are at work to deal with the problem of status inconsistency as those I have outlined in this paper for Jyapus and Shresthas and the topmost Newar Buddhists.

²² Basham, A. L.—1958, p. 18.

It must be emphasized that these mechanisms which exist for accommodating or minimising status inconsistency have the overall effect of strengthening rather than undermining the caste system as a whole. Upward social mobility (the siphoning off of status seeking Jyapus, for example, into a ritual position commensurate with their economic power) is a change in the distribution of power within the system rather than necessarily a challenge to the system as such. The point has been admirably made by Frankenberg who wrote in a recent paper: "Some social mobility between classes serves not to weaken but to strengthen the class system as a whole. In a way structurally analogous to the revolt against the king which strengthens the kingship, so the social mobility of individuals emphasizes the rigidity of the class system through which they move. Individual rebellion against class, especially if successful, may serve merely to reassert class values."²³ This seems a correct observation both for individual and group mobility within the Newar caste system, and serves to strengthen my view of the identity of much of the phenomena which we now somewhat arbitrarily assign to "class" on the one hand and "caste" on the other.

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²³ Frankenberg, R.—1961. I am indebted to Dr. Frankenberg for permission to quote this passage from this as yet unpublished paper.

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